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THE THREE CITIES

I

LOURDES

BY

ÉMILE ZOLA

Author of "Rome," etc.

TRANSLATED BY ERNEST A. VIZETELLY

VOLUME I

NEW EDITION, REVISED
AND CORRECTED

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PREFACE

BEFORE perusing this work, it is as well that the reader should understand M. Zola's aim in writing it, and his views—as distinct from those of his characters—upon Lourdes, its Grotto, and its cures. A short time before the book appeared M. Zola was interviewed upon the subject by his friend and biographer, Mr. Robert H. Sherard, to whom he spoke as follows :

"'Lourdes' came to be written by mere accident. In 1891 I happened to be travelling for my pleasure, with my wife, in the Basque country and by the Pyrenees, and being in the neighbourhood of Lourdes, included it in my tour. I spent fifteen days there, and was greatly struck by what I saw, and it then occurred to me that there was material here for just the sort of novel that I like to write—a novel in which great masses of men can be shown in motion —*un grand mouvement de foule*—a novel the subject of which stirred up my philosophical ideas.

"It was too late then to study the question, for I had visited Lourdes late in September, and so had missed seeing the best pilgrimage, which takes place in August, under the direction of the Pères de la Miséricorde, of the Rue de l'Assomption in Paris—the National Pilgrimage, as it is called. These

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Fathers are very active, enterprising men, and have made a great success of this annual national pilgrimage. Under their direction thirty thousand pilgrims are transported to Lourdes, including over a thousand sick persons.

"So in the following year I went in August, and saw a national pilgrimage, and followed it during the three days which it lasts, in addition to the two days given to travelling. After its departure, I stayed on ten or twelve days, working up the subject in every detail. My book is the story of such a national pilgrimage, and is, accordingly, the story of five days. It is divided into five parts, each of which parts is limited to one day.

"There are from ninety to one hundred characters in the story: sick persons, pilgrims, priests, nuns, hospitallers, nurses, and peasants; and the book shows Lourdes under every aspect. There are the piscinas, the processions, the Grotto, the churches at night, the people in the streets. It is, in one word, Lourdes in its entirety. In this canvas is worked out a very delicate central intrigue, as in 'Dr. Pascal,' and around this are many little stories or subsidiary plots. There is the story of the sick person who gets well, of the sick person who is not cured, and so on. The philosophical idea which pervades the whole book is the idea of human suffering, the exhibition of the desperate and despairing sufferers who, abandoned by science and by man, address themselves to a higher Power in the hope of relief; as where parents have a dearly loved daughter dying of consumption, who has been given up,

and for whom nothing remains but death. A sudden hope, however, breaks in upon them: 'supposing that after all there should be a Power greater than that of man, higher than that of science.' They will haste to try this last chance of safety. It is the instinctive hankering after the lie which creates human credulity.

"I will admit that I came across some instances of real cure. Many cases of nervous disorders have undoubtedly been cured, and there have also been other cures which may perhaps be attributed to errors of diagnosis on the part of doctors who attended the patients so cured. Often a patient is described by his doctor as suffering from consumption. He goes to Lourdes, and is cured. However, the probability is that the doctor made a mistake. In my own case I was at one time suffering from a violent pain in my chest, which presented all the symptoms of *angina pectoris*, a mortal malady. It was nothing of the sort. Indigestion, doubtless, and, as such, curable. Remember that most of the sick persons who go to Lourdes come from the country, and that the country doctors are not usually men of either great skill or great experience. But all doctors mistake symptoms. Put three doctors together to discuss a case, and in nine cases out of ten they will disagree in their diagnosis. Look at the quantities of tumours, swellings, and sores, which cannot be properly classified. These cures are based on the ignorance of the medical profession. The sick pretend, believe, that they suffer from such and such a desperate malady, whereas it

is from some other malady that they are suffering. And so the legend forms itself. And, of course, there must be cures out of so large a number of cases. Nature often cures without medical aid. Certainly, many of the workings of Nature are wonderful, but they are not supernatural. The Lourdes miracles can neither be proved nor denied. The miracle is based on human ignorance. And so the doctor who lives at Lourdes, and who is commissioned to register the cures and to tabulate the miracles, has a very careless time of it. A person comes, and gets cured. He has but to get three doctors together to examine the case. They will disagree as to what was the disease from which the patient suffered, and the only explanation left which will be acceptable to the public, with its hankering after the lie, is that a miracle has been vouchsafed.

"I interviewed a number of people at Lourdes, and could not find one who would declare that he had witnessed a miracle. All the cases which I describe in my book are real cases, in which I have only changed the names of the persons concerned. In none of these instances was I able to discover any real proof for or against the miraculous nature of the cure. Thus, in the case of Clémentine Trouvé, who figures in my story as Sophie—the patient who, after suffering for a long time from a horrid open sore on her foot, was suddenly cured, according to current report, by bathing her foot in the piscina, where the bandages fell off, and her foot was entirely restored to a healthy condition—I investigated that case thoroughly. I was told that there were three

or four ladies living in Lourdes who could guarantee the facts as stated by little Clémentine. I looked up those ladies. The first said No, she could not vouch for anything. She had seen nothing. I had better consult somebody else. The next answered in the same way, and nowhere was I able to find any corroboration of the girl's story. Yet the little girl did not look like a liar, and I believe that she was fully convinced of the miraculous nature of her cure. It is the facts themselves which lie.

"Lourdes, the Grotto, the cures, the miracles, are, indeed, the creation of that need of the Lie, that necessity for credulity, which is a characteristic of human nature. At first, when little Bernadette came with her strange story of what she had witnessed, everybody was against her. The Prefect of the Department, the Bishop, the clergy, objected to her story. But Lourdes grew up in spite of all opposition, just as the Christian religion did, because suffering humanity in its despair must cling to something, must have some hope ; and, on the other hand, because humanity thirsts after illusions. In a word, it is the story of the foundation of all religions."

To the foregoing account of "Lourdes" as supplied by its author, it may be added that the present translation, first made from early proofs of the French original whilst the latter was being completed, has for the purposes of this new American

edition been carefully and extensively revised by Mr. E. A. Vizetelly,—M. Zola's representative for all English-speaking countries. "Lourdes" forms the first volume of the "Trilogy of the Three Cities," the second being "Rome," and the third "Paris."

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LOURDES

THE FIRST DAY

I

PILGRIMS AND PATIENTS

THE pilgrims and patients, closely packed on the hard seats of a third-class carriage, were just finishing the "Ave maris Stella," which they had begun to chant on leaving the terminus of the Orleans line, when Marie, slightly raised on her couch of misery and restless with feverish impatience, caught sight of the Paris fortifications through the window of the moving train.

"Ah, the fortifications!" she exclaimed, in a tone which was joyous despite her suffering. "Here we are, out of Paris; we are off at last!"

Her delight drew a smile from her father, M. de Guersaint, who sat in front of her, whilst Abbé Pierre Froment, who was looking at her with fraternal affection, was so carried away by his compassionate anxiety as to say aloud: "And now we are in for it till to-morrow morning. We shall only

reach Lourdes at three-forty. We have more than two-and-twenty hours' journey before us."

It was half-past five, the sun had risen, radiant in the pure sky of a delightful morning. It was a Friday, the 19th of August. On the horizon, however, some small, heavy clouds already presaged a terrible day of stormy heat. And the oblique sun-rays were enfilading the compartments of the railway carriage, filling them with dancing, golden dust.

"Yes, two-and-twenty hours," murmured Marie, relapsing into a state of anguish. "*Mon Dieu!* what a long time we must still wait!"

Then her father helped her to lie down again in the narrow box, a kind of wooden gutter, in which she had been living for seven years past. Making an exception in her favour, the railway officials had consented to take as luggage the two pairs of wheels which could be removed from the box, or fitted to it whenever it became necessary to transport her from place to place. Packed between the sides of this movable coffin, she occupied the room of three passengers on the carriage seat; and for a moment she lay there with eyes closed. Although she was three and twenty, her ashen, emaciated face was still delicately infantile, charming despite everything, in the midst of her marvellous fair hair, the hair of a queen, which illness had respected. Clad with the utmost simplicity in a gown of thin woollen stuff, she wore, hanging from her neck, the card bearing her name and number, which entitled her to *hospitalisation*, or free treatment. She herself had in-

sisted on making the journey in this humble fashion, not wishing to be a source of expense to her relatives, who little by little had fallen into very straitened circumstances. And thus it was that she found herself in a third-class carriage of the "white train," the train which carried the greatest sufferers, the most woeful of the fourteen trains going to Lourdes that day, the one in which, in addition to five hundred healthy pilgrims, nearly three hundred unfortunate wretches, weak to the point of exhaustion, racked by suffering, were heaped together, and borne at express speed from one to the other end of France.

Sorry that he had saddened her, Pierre continued to gaze at her with the air of a compassionate elder brother. He had just completed his thirtieth year, and was pale and slight, with a broad forehead. After busying himself with all the arrangements for the journey, he had been desirous of accompanying her, and, having obtained admission among the Hospitallers of Our Lady of Salvation as an auxiliary member, wore on his cassock the red, orange-tipped cross of a bearer. M. de Guersaint on his side had simply pinned the little scarlet cross of the pilgrimage on his grey cloth jacket. The idea of travelling appeared to delight him ; although he was over fifty he still looked young, and, with his eyes ever wandering over the landscape, he seemed unable to keep his head still—a bird-like head it was, with an expression of good nature and absent-mindedness.

However, in spite of the violent shaking of the train, which constantly drew sighs from Marie, Sister Hyacinthe had risen to her feet in the adjoin-

ing compartment. She noticed that the sun's rays were streaming in the girl's face.

"Pull down the blind, Monsieur l'Abbé," she said to Pierre. "Come, come, we must install ourselves properly, and set our little household in order."

Clad in the black robe of a Sister of the Assumption, enlivened by a white coif, a white wimple, and a large white apron, Sister Hyacinthe smiled, the picture of courageous activity. Her youth bloomed upon her small, fresh lips, and in the depths of her beautiful blue eyes, whose expression was ever gentle. She was not pretty, perhaps, still she was charming, slender, and tall, the bib of her apron covering her flat chest like that of a young man; one of good heart, displaying a snowy complexion, and overflowing with health, gaiety, and innocence.

"But this sun is already roasting us," said she; "pray pull down your blind as well, madame."

Seated in the corner, near the Sister, was Madame de Jonquière, who had kept her little bag on her lap. She slowly pulled down the blind. Dark, and well built, she was still nice-looking, although she had a daughter, Raymonde, who was four-and-twenty, and whom for motives of propriety she had placed in the charge of two lady-hospitallers, Madame Désagneaux and Madame Volmar, in a first-class carriage. For her part, directress as she was of a ward of the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours at Lourdes, she did not quit her patients; and outside, swinging against the door of her compartment, was the regulation placard bearing under her own name those of the two Sisters

of the Assumption who accompanied her. The widow of a ruined man, she lived with her daughter on the scanty income of four or five thousand francs a year, at the rear of a courtyard in the Rue Vanneau. But her charity was inexhaustible, and she gave all her time to the work of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation, an institution whose red cross she wore on her gown of carmelite poplin, and whose aims she furthered with the most active zeal. Of a somewhat proud disposition, fond of being flattered and loved, she took great delight in this annual journey, from which both her heart and her passion derived contentment.

"You are right, Sister," she said, "we will organise matters. I really don't know why I am encumbering myself with this bag."

And thereupon she placed it under the seat, near her.

"Wait a moment," resumed Sister Hyacinthe; "you have the water-can between your legs—it is in your way."

"No, no, it is n't, I assure you. Let it be. It must always be somewhere."

Then they both set their house in order as they expressed it, so that for a day and a night they might live with their patients as comfortably as possible. The worry was that they had not been able to take Marie into their compartment, as she wished to have Pierre and her father near her; however neighbourly intercourse was easy enough over the low partition. Moreover the whole carriage, with its five compartments of ten seats each, formed but

one moving chamber, a common room as it were which the eye took in at a glance from end to end. Between its wooden walls, bare and yellow, under its white-painted panelled roof, it showed like a hospital ward, with all the disorder and promiscuous jumbling together of an improvised ambulance. Basins, brooms, and sponges lay about, half-hidden by the seats. Then, as the train only carried such luggage as the pilgrims could take with them, there were valises, deal boxes, bonnet boxes, and bags, a wretched pile of poor worn-out things mended with bits of string, heaped up a little bit everywhere; and overhead the litter began again, what with articles of clothing, parcels, and baskets hanging from brass pegs and swinging to and fro without a pause.

Amidst all this frippery the more afflicted patients, stretched on their narrow mattresses, which took up the room of several passengers, were shaken, carried along by the rumbling gyrations of the wheels; whilst those who were able to remain seated, leaned against the partitions, their faces pale, their heads resting upon pillows. According to the regulations there should have been one lady-hospitaller to each compartment. However, at the other end of the carriage there was but a second Sister of the Assumption, Sister Claire des Anges. Some of the pilgrims who were in good health were already getting up, eating and drinking. One compartment was entirely occupied by women, ten pilgrims closely pressed together, young ones and old ones, all sadly, pitifully ugly. And as nobody dared to open the windows on account of the consumptives in the car-

riage, the heat was soon felt and an unbearable odour arose, set free as it were by the jolting of the train as it went its way at express speed.

They had said their chaplets at Juvisy; and six o'clock was striking, and they were rushing like a hurricane past the station of Brétigny, when Sister Hyacinthe stood up. It was she who directed the pious exercises, which most of the pilgrims followed from small, blue-covered books.

"The Angelus, my children," said she with a pleasant smile, a maternal air which her great youth rendered very charming and sweet.

Then the "Aves" again followed one another, and were drawing to an end when Pierre and Marie began to feel interested in two women who occupied the other corner seats of their compartment. One of them, she who sat at Marie's feet, was a blonde of slender build and *bourgeoise* appearance, some thirty and odd years of age, and faded before she had grown old. She shrank back, scarcely occupying any room, wearing a dark dress, and showing colourless hair, and a long grief-stricken face which expressed unlimited self-abandonment, infinite sadness. The woman in front of her, she who sat on the same seat as Pierre, was of the same age, but belonged to the working classes. She wore a black cap and displayed a face ravaged by wretchedness and anxiety, whilst on her lap she held a little girl of seven, who was so pale, so wasted by illness, that she scarcely seemed four. With her nose contracted, her eyelids lowered and showing blue in her waxen face, the child was unable to speak, unable to

give utterance to more than a low plaint, a gentle moan, which rent the heart of her mother, leaning over her, each time that she heard it.

"Would she eat a few grapes?" timidly asked the lady who had hitherto preserved silence. "I have some in my basket."

"Thank you, madame," replied the woman, "she only takes milk, and sometimes not even that willingly. I took care to bring a bottleful with me."

Then, giving way to the desire which possesses the wretched to confide their woes to others, she began to relate her story. Her name was Vincent, and her husband, a gilder by trade, had been carried off by consumption. Left alone with her little Rose, who was the passion of her heart, she had worked by day and night at her calling as a dressmaker in order to bring the child up. But disease had come, and for fourteen months now she had had her in her arms like that, growing more and more woeful and wasted until reduced almost to nothingness. She, the mother, who never went to mass, had one day entered a church, impelled by despair to pray for her daughter's cure; and there she had heard a voice which had told her to take the little one to Lourdes, where the Blessed Virgin would have pity on her. Acquainted with nobody, not knowing even how the pilgrimages were organised, she had had but one idea—to work, save up the money necessary for the journey, take a ticket, and start off with the thirty sous remaining to her, destitute of all supplies save a bottle of milk for the child, not having even thought of purchasing a crust of bread for herself.

"What is the poor little thing suffering from?" resumed the lady.

"Oh, it must be consumption of the bowels, madame! But the doctors have names they give it. At first she only had slight pains in the stomach. Then her stomach began to swell and she suffered, oh, so dreadfully! it made one cry to see her. Her stomach has gone down now, only she 's worn out; she has got so thin that she has no legs left her, and she 's wasting away with continual sweating."

Then, as Rose, raising her eyelids, began to moan, her mother leant over her, distracted and turning pale. "What is the matter, my jewel, my treasure?" she asked. "Are you thirsty?"

But the little girl was already closing her dim eyes of a hazy sky-blue hue, and did not even answer, but relapsed into her torpor, quite white in the white frock she wore—a last coquetry on the part of her mother, who had gone to this useless expense in the hope that the Virgin would be more compassionate and gentle to a little sufferer who was well dressed, so immaculately white.

There was an interval of silence, and then Madame Vincent inquired: "And you, madame, it 's for yourself no doubt that you are going to Lourdes? One can see very well that you are ill."

But the lady, with a frightened look, shrank woefully into her corner, murmuring: "No, no, I am not ill. Would to God that I were! I should suffer less."

Her name was Madame Maze, and her heart was full of an incurable grief. After a love marriage to

a big, gay fellow with ripe, red lips, she had found herself deserted at the end of a twelvemonth's honeymoon. Ever travelling, following the profession of a jeweller's bagman, her husband, who earned a deal of money, would disappear for six months at a stretch, deceive her from one frontier to the other of France, at times even carrying creatures about with him. And she worshipped him; she suffered so frightfully from it all that she had sought a remedy in religion, and had at last made up her mind to repair to Lourdes, in order to pray the Virgin to restore her husband to her and make him amend his ways.

Although Madame Vincent did not understand the other's words, she realised that she was a prey to great mental affliction, and they continued looking at one another, the mother, whom the sight of her dying daughter was killing, and the abandoned wife, whom her passion cast into throes of death-like agony.

However, Pierre, who, like Marie, had been listening to the conversation, now intervened. He was astonished that the dressmaker had not sought free treatment for her little patient. The Association of Our Lady of Salvation had been founded by the Augustine Fathers of the Assumption after the Franco-German war, with the object of contributing to the salvation of France and the defence of the Church by prayer in common and the practice of charity; and it was this association which had promoted the great pilgrimage movement, in particular initiating and unremittingly extending the national

pilgrimage which every year, towards the close of August, set out for Lourdes. An elaborate organisation had been gradually perfected, donations of considerable amounts were collected in all parts of the world, sufferers were enrolled in every parish, and agreements were signed with the railway companies, to say nothing of the active help of the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the establishment of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation, a widespread brotherhood of the benevolent, in which one beheld men and women, mostly belonging to society, who, under the orders of the pilgrimage managers, nursed the sick, helped to transport them, and watched over the observance of good discipline. A written request was needed for the sufferers to obtain *hospitalisation*, which dispensed them from making the smallest payment in respect either of their journey or their sojourn; they were fetched from their homes and conveyed back thither; and they simply had to provide a few provisions for the road. By far the greater number were recommended by priests or benevolent persons, who superintended the inquiries concerning them and obtained the needful papers, such as doctors' certificates and certificates of birth. And, these matters being settled, the sick ones had nothing further to trouble about, they became but so much suffering flesh, food for miracles, in the hands of the hospitallers of either sex.

"But you need only have applied to your parish priest, madame," Pierre explained. "This poor child is deserving of all sympathy. She would have been immediately admitted."

"I did not know it, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"Then how did you manage?"

"Why, Monsieur l'Abbé, I went to take a ticket at a place which one of my neighbours, who reads the newspapers, told me about."

She was referring to the tickets, at greatly reduced rates, which were issued to the pilgrims possessed of means. And Marie, listening to her, felt great pity for her, and also some shame; for she who was not entirely destitute of resources had succeeded in obtaining *hospitalisation*, thanks to Pierre, whereas that mother and her sorry child, after exhausting their scanty savings, remained without a copper.

However, a more violent jolt of the carriage drew a cry of pain from the girl. "Oh, father," she said, "pray raise me a little! I can't stay on my back any longer."

When M. de Guersaint had helped her into a sitting posture, she gave a deep sigh of relief. They were now at Étampes, after a run of an hour and a half from Paris, and what with the increased warmth of the sun, the dust, and the noise, weariness was becoming apparent already. Madame de Jonquière had got up to speak a few words of kindly encouragement to Marie over the partition; and Sister Hyacinthe moreover again rose, and gaily clapped her hands that she might be heard and obeyed from one to the other end of the carriage.

"Come, come!" said she, "we must n't think of our little troubles. Let us pray and sing, and the Blessed Virgin will be with us."

She herself then began the rosary according to the

rite of Our Lady of Lourdes, and all the patients and pilgrims followed her. This was the first chaplet—the five joyful mysteries, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Purification, and Jesus found in the Temple. Then they all began to chant the canticle: "Let us contemplate the heavenly Archangel!" Their voices were lost amid the loud rumbling of the wheels; you heard but the muffled surging of that human wave, stifling within the closed carriage which rolled on and on without a pause.

Although M. de Guersaint was a worshipper, he could never follow a hymn to the end. He got up, sat down again, and finished by resting his elbow on the partition and conversing in an undertone with a patient who sat against this same partition in the next compartment. The patient in question was a thick-set man of fifty, with a good-natured face and a large head, completely bald. His name was Sabathier, and for fifteen years he had been stricken with ataxia. He only suffered pain by fits and starts, but he had quite lost the use of his legs, which his wife, who accompanied him, moved for him as though they had been dead legs, whenever they became too heavy, weighty like bars of lead.

"Yes, monsieur," he said, "such as you see me, I was formerly fifth-class professor at the Lycée Charlemagne. At first I thought that it was mere sciatica, but afterwards I was seized with sharp, lightning-like pains, red-hot sword thrusts, you know, in the muscles. For nearly ten years the disease kept on mastering me more and more. I consulted all the doctors, tried every imaginable

mineral spring, and now I suffer less, but I can no longer move from my seat. And then, after long living without a thought of religion, I was led back to God by the idea that I was too wretched, and that Our Lady of Lourdes could not do otherwise than take pity on me."

Feeling interested, Pierre in his turn had leant over the partition and was listening.

"Is it not so, Monsieur l'Abbé?" continued M. Sabathier. "Is not suffering the best awakener of souls? This is the seventh year that I am going to Lourdes without despairing of cure. This year the Blessed Virgin will cure me, I feel sure of it. Yes, I expect to be able to walk about again; I now live solely in that hope."

M. Sabathier paused, he wished his wife to push his legs a little more to the left; and Pierre looked at him, astonished to find such obstinate faith in a man of intellect, in one of those university professors who, as a rule, are such Voltairians. How could the belief in miracles have germinated and taken root in this man's brain? As he himself said, great suffering alone explained this need of illusion, this blossoming of eternal and consolatory hope.

"And my wife and I," resumed the ex-professor, "are dressed, you see, as poor folks, for I wished to go as a mere pauper this year, and applied for *hospitalisation* in a spirit of humility in order that the Blessed Virgin might include me among the wretched, her children—only, as I did not wish to take the place of a real pauper, I gave fifty francs to the Hospitalité, and this, as you are aware, gives

one the right to have a patient of one's own in the pilgrimage. I even know my patient. He was introduced to me at the railway station. He is suffering from tuberculosis, it appears, and seemed to me very low, very low."

A fresh interval of silence ensued. "Well," said M. Sabathier at last, "may the Blessed Virgin save him also, she who can do everything. I shall be so happy; she will have loaded me with favours."

Then the three men, isolating themselves from the others, went on conversing together, at first on medical subjects, and at last diverging into a discussion on romanesque architecture, *à propos* of a steeple which they had perceived on a hillside, and which every pilgrim had saluted with a sign of the cross. Swayed once more by the habits of cultivated intellect, the young priest and his two companions forgot themselves together in the midst of their fellow-passengers, all those poor, suffering, simple-minded folk, whom wretchedness stupefied. Another hour went by, two more canticles had just been sung, and the stations of Toury and Les Aubrais had been left behind, when, at Beaugency, they at last ceased their chat, on hearing Sister Hyacinthe clap her hands and intonate in her fresh, sonorous voice:

"*Parce, Domine, parce populo tuo.*"

And then the chant went on; all voices became mingled in that ever-surging wave of prayer which stilled pain, excited hope, and little by little penetrated the entire being, harassed by the haunting thought of the grace and cure which one and all were going to seek so far away.

However, as Pierre sat down again, he saw that Marie was very pale, and had her eyes closed. By the painful contraction of her features he could tell that she was not asleep. "Are you in great suffering?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, I suffer dreadfully. I shall never last to the end. It is this incessant jolting."

She moaned, raised her eyelids, and, half-fainting, remained in a sitting posture, her eyes turned on the other sufferers. In the adjoining compartment, La Grivotte, hitherto stretched out, scarce breathing, like a corpse, had just raised herself up in front of M. Sabathier. She was a tall, slip-shod, singular-looking creature of over thirty, with a round, ravaged face, which her frizzy hair and flaming eyes rendered almost pretty. She had reached the third stage of phthisis.

"Eh, mademoiselle," she said, addressing herself in a hoarse, indistinct voice to Marie, "how nice it would be if we could only doze off a little. But it can't be managed; all these wheels keep on whirling round and round in one's head."

Then, although it fatigued her to speak, she obstinately went on talking, volunteering particulars about herself. She was a mattress-maker, and with one of her aunts had long gone from yard to yard at Bercy to comb and sew up mattresses. And, indeed, it was to the pestilential wool which she had combed in her youth that she ascribed her malady. For five years she had been making the round of the hospitals of Paris, and she spoke familiarly of all the great doctors. It was the Sisters of Charity, at the

Lariboisière hospital, who, finding that she had a passion for religious ceremonies, had completed her conversion, and convinced her that the Virgin awaited her at Lourdes to cure her.

"I certainly need it," said she. "The doctors say that I have one lung done for, and that the other one is scarcely any better. There are great big holes you know. At first I only felt bad between the shoulders and spat up some froth. But then I got thin, and became a dreadful sight. And now I 'm always in a sweat, and cough till I think I 'm going to bring my heart up. And I can no longer spit. And I have n't the strength to stand, you see. I can't eat."

A stifling sensation made her pause, and she became livid.

"All the same I prefer being in my skin instead of in that of the Brother in the compartment behind you. He has the same complaint as I have, but he is in a worse state that I am."

She was mistaken. In the farther compartment, beyond Marie, there was indeed a young missionary, Brother Isidore, who was lying on a mattress and could not be seen, since he was unable to raise even a finger. But he was not suffering from phthisis. He was dying of inflammation of the liver, contracted in Senegal. Very long and lank, he had a yellow face, with skin as dry and lifeless as parchment. The abscess which had formed in his liver had ended by breaking out externally, and amidst the continuous shivering of fever, vomiting, and delirium, suppuration was exhausting him. His eyes

alone were still alive, eyes full of unextinguishable love, whose flame lighted up his expiring face, a peasant face such as painters have given to the crucified Christ, common, but rendered sublime at moments by its expression of faith and passion. He was a Breton, the last puny child of an over-numerous family, and had left his little share of land to his elder brothers. One of his sisters, Marthe, older than himself by a couple of years, accompanied him. She had been in service in Paris, an insignificant maid-of-all-work, but withal so devoted to her brother that she had left her situation to follow him, subsisting scantily on her petty savings.

"I was lying on the platform," resumed La Grivotte, "when he was put in the carriage. There were four men carrying him——"

But she was unable to speak any further, for just then an attack of coughing shook her and threw her back upon the seat. She was suffocating, and the red flush on her cheek-bones turned blue. Sister Hyacinthe, however, immediately raised her head and wiped her lips with a linen cloth, which became spotted with blood. At the same time Madame de Jonquière gave her attention to a patient in front of her, who had just fainted. She was called Madame Vêtu, and was the wife of a petty clockmaker of the Mouffetard district, who had not been able to shut up his shop in order to accompany her to Lourdes. And to make sure that she would be cared for she had sought and obtained *hospitalisation*. The fear of death was bringing her back to religion, although she had not set foot in church since her first com-

munion. She knew that she was lost, that a cancer in the chest was eating into her; and she already had the haggard, orange-hued mark of the cancerous patient. Since the beginning of the journey she had not spoken a word, but, suffering terribly, had remained with her lips tightly closed. Then all at once, she had swooned away after an attack of vomiting.

"It is unbearable!" murmured Madame de Jonquière, who herself felt faint; "we must let in a little fresh air."

Sister Hyacinthe was just then laying La Grivotte to rest on her pillows, "Certainly," said she, "we will open the window for a few moments. But not on this side, for I am afraid we might have a fresh fit of coughing. Open the window on your side, madame."

The heat was still increasing, and the occupants of the carriage were stifling in that heavy evil-smelling atmosphere. The pure air which came in when the window was opened brought relief however. For a moment there were other duties to be attended to, a clearance and cleansing. The Sister emptied the basins out of the window, whilst the lady-hospitaller wiped the shaking floor with a sponge. Next, things had to be set in order; and then came a fresh anxiety, for the fourth patient, a slender girl whose face was entirely covered by a black fichu, and who had not yet moved, was saying that she felt hungry.

With quiet devotion Madame de Jonquière immediately tendered her services. "Don't you

trouble, Sister," she said, "I will cut her bread into little bits for her."

Marie, with the need she felt of diverting her mind from her own sufferings, had already begun to take an interest in that motionless sufferer whose countenance was so thickly veiled, for she not unnaturally suspected that it was a case of some distressing facial sore. She had merely been told that the patient was a servant, which was true, but it happened that the poor creature, a native of Picardy, named Élise Rouquet, had been obliged to leave her situation, and seek a home with a sister who ill-treated her, for no hospital would take her in. Extremely devout, she had for many months been possessed by an ardent desire to go to Lourdes.

While Marie, with dread in her heart, waited for the fichu to be moved aside, Madame de Jonquière. having cut some bread into small pieces, inquired maternally: "Are they small enough? Can you put them into your mouth?"

Thereupon a hoarse voice growled confused words under the black fichu: "Yes, yes, madame." And at last the veil fell and Marie shuddered with horror.

It was a case of lupus which had preyed upon the unhappy woman's nose and mouth. Ulceration had spread, and was hourly spreading—in short, all the hideous peculiarities of this terrible disease were in full process of development, almost obliterating the traces of what once were pleasing womanly lineaments.

"Oh, look, Pierre!" Marie murmured, trembling.

The priest in his turn shuddered as he beheld

Elise Rouquet cautiously slipping the tiny pieces of bread into her poor shapeless mouth. Everyone in the carriage had turned pale at sight of the awful apparition. And the same thought ascended from all those hope-inflated souls. Ah ! Blessed Virgin, Powerful Virgin, what a miracle indeed if such an ill were cured !

" We must not think of ourselves, my children, if we wish to get well," resumed Sister Hyacinthe, who still retained her encouraging smile.

And then she made them say the second chaplet, the five sorrowful mysteries : Jesus in the Garden of Olives, Jesus scourged, Jesus crowned with thorns, Jesus carrying the cross, and Jesus crucified. Afterwards came the canticle : " In thy help, Virgin, do I put my trust."

They had just passed through Blois; for three long hours they had been rolling onward ; and Marie, who had averted her eyes from Elise Rouquet, now turned them upon a man who occupied a corner seat in the compartment on her left, that in which Brother Isidore was lying. She had noticed this man several times already. Poorly clad in an old black frock-coat, he looked still young, although his sparse beard was already turning grey ; and, short and emaciated, he seemed to experience great suffering, his fleshless, livid face being covered with sweat. However, he remained motionless, ensconced in his corner, speaking to nobody, but staring straight before him with dilated eyes. And all at once Marie noticed that his eyelids were falling, and that he was fainting away.

She thereupon drew Sister's Hyacinthe's attention to him: "Look, Sister! One would think that that gentleman is dangerously ill."

"Which one, my dear child?"

"That one, over there, with his head thrown back."

General excitement followed, all the healthy pilgrims rose up to look, and it occurred to Madame de Jonquière to call to Marthe, Brother Isidore's sister, and tell her to tap the man's hands.

"Question him," she added; "ask what ails him."

Marthe drew near, shook the man, and questioned him.

But instead of an answer only a rattle came from his throat, and his eyes remained closed.

Then a frightened voice was heard saying, "I think he is going to die."

The dread increased, words flew about, advice was tendered from one to the other end of the carriage. Nobody knew the man. He had certainly not obtained *hospitalisation*, for no white card was hanging from his neck. Somebody related, however, that he had seen him arrive, dragging himself along, but three minutes or so before the train started; and that he had remained quite motionless, scarce breathing, ever since he had flung himself with an air of intense weariness into that corner, where he was now apparently dying. His ticket was at last seen protruding from under the band of an old silk hat which was hung from a peg near him.

"Ah, he is breathing again now!" Sister Hyacinthe suddenly exclaimed. "Ask him his name."

However, on being again questioned by Marthe, the man merely gave vent to a low plaint, an exclamation scarcely articulated, "Oh, how I suffer!"

And thenceforward that was the only answer that could be obtained from him. With reference to everything that they wished to know, who he was, whence he came, what his illness was, what could be done for him, he gave no information, but still and ever continued moaning, "Oh, how I suffer—how I suffer!"

Sister Hyacinthe grew restless with impatience. Ah, if she had only been in the same compartment with him! And she resolved that she would change her seat at the first station they should stop at. Only there would be no stoppage for a long time. The position was becoming terrible, the more so as the man's head again fell back.

"He is dying, he is dying!" repeated the frightened voice.

What was to be done, *mon Dieu?* The Sister was aware that one of the Fathers of the Assumption, Father Massias, was in the train with the Holy Oils, ready to administer extreme unction to the dying; for every year some of the patients passed away during the journey. But she did not dare to have recourse to the alarm signal. Moreover, in the *cantine* van where Sister Saint François officiated, there was a doctor with a little medicine chest. If the sufferer should survive until they reached Poitiers, where there would be half an hour's stoppage, all possible help might be given to him.

But on the other hand he might suddenly expire. However, they ended by becoming somewhat calmer. The man, though still unconscious, began to breathe in a more regular manner, and seemed to fall asleep.

"To think of it, to die before getting there," murmured Marie with a shudder, "to die in sight of the promised land!" And as her father sought to reassure her she added: "I am suffering—I am suffering dreadfully myself."

"Have confidence," said Pierre; "the Blessed Virgin is watching over you."

She could no longer remain seated, and it became necessary to replace her in a recumbent position in her narrow coffin. Her father and the priest had to take every precaution in doing so, for the slightest hurt drew a moan from her. And she lay there breathless, like one dead, her face contracted by suffering, and surrounded by her regal fair hair. They had now been rolling on, ever rolling on for nearly four hours. And if the carriage was so greatly shaken, with an unbearable spreading tendency, it was from its position at the rear part of the train. The coupling irons shrieked, the wheels growled furiously; and as it was necessary to leave the windows partially open, the dust came in, acrid and burning; but it was especially the heat which grew terrible, a devouring, stormy heat falling from a tawny sky which large hanging clouds had slowly covered. The hot carriages, those rolling boxes where the pilgrims ate and drank, where the sick lay in a vitiated atmosphere, amid dizzying moans, prayers, and hymns, became like so many furnaces.

And Marie was not the only one whose condition had been aggravated; others also were suffering from the journey. Resting in the lap of her despairing mother, who gazed at her with large, tear-blurred eyes, little Rose had ceased to stir, and had grown so pale that Madame Maze had twice leant forward to feel her hands, fearful lest she should find them cold. At each moment also Madame Sabathier had to move her husband's legs, for their weight was so great, said he, that it seemed as if his hips were being torn from him. Brother Isidore too had just begun to cry out, emerging from his wonted torpor; and his sister had only been able to assuage his sufferings by raising him, and clasping him in her arms. La Grivotte seemed to be asleep, but a continuous hiccoughing shook her, and a tiny streamlet of blood dribbled from her mouth. Madame Vêtu had again vomited, Élise Rouquet no longer thought of hiding the frightful sore open on her face. And from the man yonder, breathing hard, there still came a lugubrious rattle, as though he were at every moment on the point of expiring. In vain did Madame de Jonquière and Sister Hyacinthe lavish their attentions on the patients, they could but slightly assuage so much suffering. At times it all seemed like an evil dream—that carriage of wretchedness and pain, hurried along at express speed, with a continuous shaking and jolting which made everything hanging from the pegs—the old clothes, the worn-out baskets mended with bits of string—swing to and fro incessantly. And in the compartment at the far end, the ten female pilgrims.

some old, some young, and all pitifully ugly, sang on without a pause in cracked voices, shrill and dreary.

Then Pierre began to think of the other carriages of the train, that white train which conveyed most, if not all, of the more seriously afflicted patients; these carriages were rolling along, all displaying similar scenes of suffering among the three hundred sick and five hundred healthy pilgrims crowded within them. And afterwards he thought of the other trains which were leaving Paris that day, the grey train and the blue train[1] which had preceded the white one, the green train, the yellow train, the pink train, the orange train which were following it. From hour to hour trains set out from one to the other end of France. And he thought, too, of those which that same morning had started from Orleans, Le Mans, Poitiers, Bordeaux, Marseilles, and Carcassonne. Coming from all parts, trains were rushing across that land of France at the same hour, all directing their course yonder towards the holy Grotto, bringing thirty thousand patients and pilgrims to the Virgin's feet. And he reflected that other days of the year witnessed a like rush of human beings, that not a week went by without Lourdes beholding the arrival of some pilgrimage; that it was not merely France which set out on the march, but all Europe, the whole world; that in certain years of great religious fervour there had

[1] Different-coloured tickets are issued for these trains; it is for this reason that they are called the white, blue, and grey trains, etc.—*Trans.*

been three hundred thousand, and even five hundred thousand, pilgrims and patients streaming to the spot.

Pierre fancied that he could hear those flying trains, those trains from everywhere, all converging towards the same rocky cavity where the tapers were blazing. They all rumbled loudly amid the cries of pain and snatches of hymns wafted from their carriages. They were the rolling hospitals of disease at its last stage, of human suffering rushing to the hope of cure, furiously seeking consolation between attacks of increased severity, with the ever-present threat of death—death hastened, supervening under awful conditions, amidst the mob-like scramble. They rolled on, they rolled on again and again, they rolled on without a pause, carrying the wretchedness of the world on its way to the divine illusion, the health of the infirm, the consolation of the afflicted.

And immense pity overflowed from Pierre's heart, human compassion for all the suffering and all the tears that consumed weak and naked men. He was sad unto death and ardent charity burnt within him, the unextinguishable flame as it were of his fraternal feelings towards all things and beings.

When they left the station of Saint Pierre des Corps at half-past ten, Sister Hyacinthe gave the signal, and they recited the third chaplet, the five glorious mysteries, the Resurrection of Our Lord, the Ascension of Our Lord, the Mission of the Holy Ghost, the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin, the Crowning of the Most Blessed Virgin. And

afterwards they sang the canticle of Bernadette, that long, long chant, composed of six times ten couplets, to which the ever recurring Angelic Salutation serves as a refrain—a prolonged lullaby slowly besetting one until it ends by penetrating one's entire being, transporting one into ecstatic sleep, in delicious expectancy of a miracle.

II

PIERRE AND MARIE

THE green landscapes of Poitou were now defiling before them, and Abbé Pierre Froment, gazing out of the window, watched the trees fly away till, little by little, he ceased to distinguish them. A steeple appeared and then vanished, and all the pilgrims crossed themselves. They would not reach Poitiers until twelve-thirty-five, and the train was still rolling on amid the growing weariness of that oppressive, stormy day. Falling into a deep reverie, the young priest no longer heard the words of the canticle, which sounded in his ears merely like a slow, wavy lullaby.

Forgetfulness of the present had come upon him, an awakening of the past filled his whole being. He was reascending the stream of memory, reascending it to its source. He again beheld the house at Neuilly, where he had been born and where he still lived, that home of peace and toil, with its garden planted with a few fine trees, and parted by a quickset hedge and palisade from the garden of the neighbouring house, which was similar to his own. He was again three, perhaps four, years old, and

round a table, shaded by the big horse-chestnut tree he once more beheld his father, his mother, and his elder brother at *déjeuner*. To his father, Michel Froment, he could give no distinct lineaments; he pictured him but faintly, vaguely, renowned as an illustrious chemist, bearing the title of Member of the Institute, and leading a cloistered life in the laboratory which he had installed in that secluded, deserted suburb. However he could plainly see his first brother Guillaume, then fourteen years of age, whom some holiday had brought from college that morning, and then and even more vividly his mother, so gentle and so quiet, with eyes so full of active kindliness. Later on he learnt what anguish had racked that religious soul, that believing woman who, from esteem and gratitude, had resignedly accepted marriage with an unbeliever, her senior by fifteen years, to whom her relatives were indebted for great services. He, Pierre, the tardy offspring of this union, born when his father was already near his fiftieth year, had only known his mother as a respectful, conquered woman in the presence of her husband, whom she had learnt to love passionately, with the frightful torment of knowing, however, that he was doomed to perdition. And, all at once, another memory flashed upon the young priest, the terrible memory of the day when his father had died, killed in his laboratory by an accident, the explosion of a retort. He, Pierre, had then been five years old, and he remembered the slightest incidents — his mother's cry when she had found the shattered body among the remnants of the chemical appliances, then

her terror, her sobs, her prayers at the idea that God had slain the unbeliever, damned him for evermore. Not daring to burn his books and papers, she had contented herself with locking up the laboratory, which henceforth nobody entered. And from that moment, haunted by a vision of hell, she had had but one idea, to possess herself of her second son, who was still so young, to give him a strictly religious training, and through him to ransom her husband —secure his forgiveness from God. Guillaume, her elder boy, had already ceased to belong to her, having grown up at college, where he had been won over by the ideas of the century; but she resolved that the other, the younger one, should not leave the house, but should have a priest as tutor; and her secret dream, her consuming hope, was that she might some day see him a priest himself, saying his first mass and solacing souls whom the thought of eternity tortured.

Then between green, leafy boughs, flecked with sunlight, another figure rose vividly before Pierre's eyes. He suddenly beheld Marie de Guersaint as he had seen her one morning through a gap in the hedge dividing the two gardens. M. de Guersaint, who belonged to the petty Norman *noblesse*, was a combination of architect and inventor; and he was at that time busy with a scheme of model dwellings for the poor, to which churches and schools were to be attached; an affair of considerable magnitude, planned none too well, however, and in which, with his customary impetuosity, the lack of foresight of an imperfect artist, he was risking the three hundred

thousand francs that he possessed. A similarity of religious faith had drawn Madame de Guersaint and Madame Froment together ; but the former was altogether a superior woman, perspicuous and rigid, with an iron hand which alone prevented her household from gliding to a catastrophe; and she was bringing up her two daughters, Blanche and Marie, in principles of narrow piety, the elder one already being as grave as herself, whilst the younger, albeit very devout, was still fond of play, with an intensity of life within her which found vent in gay peals of sonorous laughter. From their early childhood Pierre and Marie played together, the hedge was ever being crossed, the two families constantly mingled. And on that clear sunshiny morning, when he pictured her parting the leafy branches she was already ten years old. He, who was sixteen, was to enter the seminary on the following Tuesday. Never had she seemed to him so pretty. Her hair, of a pure golden hue, was so long that when it was let down it sufficed to clothe her. Well did he remember her face as it had been, with round cheeks, blue eyes, red mouth, and skin of dazzling, snowy whiteness. She was indeed as gay and brilliant as the sun itself, a transplendency. Yet there were tears at the corners of her eyes, for she was aware of his coming departure. They sat down together at the far end of the garden, in the shadow cast by the hedge. Their hands mingled, and their hearts were very heavy. They had, however, never exchanged any vows amid their pastimes, for their innocence was absolute. But now, on the eve of

separation, their mutual tenderness rose to their lips, and they spoke without knowing, swore that they would ever think of one another, and find one another again, some day, even as one meets in heaven to be very, very happy. Then, without understanding how it happened, they clasped each other tightly, to the point of suffocation, and kissed each other's face, weeping, the while, hot tears. And it was that delightful memory which Pierre had ever carried with him, which he felt alive within him still, after so many years, and after so many painful renunciations.

Just then a more violent shock roused him from his reverie. He turned his eyes upon the carriage and vaguely espied the suffering beings it contained —Madame Maze motionless, overwhelmed with grief; little Rose gently moaning in her mother's lap; La Grivotte, whom a hoarse cough was choking. For a moment Sister Hyacinthe's gay face shone out amidst the whiteness of her coif and wimple, dominating all the others. The painful journey was continuing, with a ray of divine hope still and ever shining yonder. Then everything slowly vanished from Pierre's eyes as a fresh wave of memory brought the past back from afar; and nothing of the present remained save the lulling hymn, the indistinct voices of dreamland, emerging from the invisible.

Henceforth he was at the seminary. The classrooms, the recreation ground with its trees, rose up clearly before him. But all at once he only beheld, as in a mirror, the youthful face which had then

been his, and he contemplated it and scrutinised it, as though it had been the face of a stranger. Tall and slender, he had an elongated visage, with an unusually developed forehead, lofty and straight like a tower ; whilst his jaws tapered, ending in a small refined chin. He seemed, in fact, to be all brains ; his mouth, rather large, alone retained an expression of tenderness. Indeed, when his usually serious face relaxed, his mouth and eyes acquired an exceedingly soft expression, betokening an unsatisfied, hungry desire to love, devote oneself, and live. But immediately afterwards, the look of intellectual passion would come back again, that intellectuality which had ever consumed him with an anxiety to understand and know. And it was with surprise that he now recalled those years of seminary life. How was it that he had so long been able to accept the rude discipline of blind faith, of obedient belief in everything without the slightest examination ? It had been required of him that he should absolutely surrender his reasoning faculties, and he had striven to do so, had succeeded indeed in stifling his torturing need of truth. Doubtless he had been softened, weakened by his mother's tears, had been possessed by the sole desire to afford her the great happiness she dreamt of. Yet now he remembered certain quiverings of revolt ; he found in the depths of his mind the memory of nights which he had spent in weeping without knowing why, nights peopled with vague images, nights through which galloped the free, virile life of the world, when Marie's face incessantly returned to him, such as he had seen it one morn-

ing, dazzling and bathed in tears, while she embraced him with her whole soul. And that alone now remained; his years of religious study with their monotonous lessons, their ever similar exercises and ceremonies, had flown away into the same haze, into a vague half-light, full of mortal silence.

Then, just as the train had passed though a station at full speed, with the sudden uproar of its rush there arose within him a succession of confused visions. He had noticed a large deserted enclosure, and fancied that he could see himself within it at twenty years of age. His reverie was wandering. An indisposition of rather long duration had, however, at one time interrupted his studies, and led to his being sent into the country. He had remained for a long time without seeing Marie; during his vacations spent at Neuilly he had twice failed to meet her, for she was almost always travelling. He knew that she was very ill, in consequence of a fall from a horse when she was thirteen, a critical moment in a girl's life; and her despairing mother, perplexed by the contradictory advice of medical men, was taking her each year to a different watering-place. Then he learnt the startling news of the sudden tragical death of that mother, who was so severe and yet so useful to her kin. She had been carried off in five days by inflammation of the lungs, which she had contracted one evening whilst she was out walking at La Bourboule, through having taken off her mantle to place it round the shoulders of Marie, who had been conveyed thither for treatment. It had been necessary that the father should at once

start off to fetch his daughter, who was mad with grief, and the corpse of his wife, who had been so suddenly torn from him. And unhappily, after losing her, the affairs of the family went from bad to worse in the hands of this architect, who, without counting, flung his fortune into the yawning gulf of his unsuccessful enterprises. Marie no longer stirred from her couch; only Blanche remained to manage the household, and she had matters of her own to attend to, being busy with the last examinations which she had to pass, the diplomas which she was obstinately intent on securing, foreseeing as she did that she would some day have to earn her bread.

All at once, from amidst this mass of confused, half-forgotten incidents, Pierre was conscious of the rise of a vivid vision. Ill-health, he remembered, had again compelled him to take a holiday. He had just completed his twenty-fourth year, he was greatly behindhand, having so far only secured the four minor orders; but on his return a sub-deaconship would be conferred on him, and an inviolable vow would bind him for evermore. And the Guersaints' little garden at Neuilly, whither he had formerly so often gone to play, again distinctly appeared before him. Marie's couch had been rolled under the tall trees at the far end of the garden near the hedge, they were alone together in the sad peacefulness of an autumnal afternoon, and he saw Marie, clad in deep mourning for her mother and reclining there with legs inert; whilst he, also clad in black, in a cassock already, sat near her on an iron garden chair. For five years

she had been suffering. She was now eighteen, paler and thinner than formerly, but still adorable with her regal golden hair, which illness respected. He believed from what he had heard that she was destined to remain infirm, condemned never to become a woman, stricken even in her sex. The doctors, who failed to agree respecting her case, had abandoned her. Doubtless it was she who told him these things that dreary afternoon, whilst the yellow withered leaves rained upon them. However, he could not remember the words that they had spoken; her pale smile, her young face, still so charming though already dimmed by regretfulness for life, alone remained present with him. But he realised that she had evoked the far-off day of their parting, on that same spot, behind the hedge flecked with sunlight; and all that was already as though dead —their tears, their embrace, their promise to find one another some day with a certainty of happiness. For although they had found one another again, what availed it, since she was but a corpse, and he was about to bid farewell to the life of the world? As the doctors condemned her, as she would never be woman, nor wife, nor mother, he, on his side, might well renounce manhood, and annihilate himself, dedicate himself to God, to whom his mother gave him. And he still felt within him the soft bitterness of that last interview: Marie smiling painfully at memory of their childish play and prattle, and speaking to him of the happiness which he would assuredly find in the service of God; so penetrated indeed with emotion at this thought, that she

had made him promise that he would let her hear him say his first mass.

But the train was passing the station of Sainte-Maure, and just then a sudden uproar momentarily brought Pierre's attention back to the carriage and its occupants. He fancied that there had been some fresh seizure or swooning, but the suffering faces that he beheld were still the same, ever contracted by the same expression of anxious waiting for the divine succour which was so slow in coming. M. Sabathier was vainly striving to get his legs into a comfortable position, whilst Brother Isidore raised a feeble continuous moan like a dying child, and Madame Vêtu, a prey to terrible agony, devoured by her disease, sat motionless, and kept her lips tightly closed, her face distorted, haggard, and almost black. The noise which Pierre had heard had been occasioned by Madame de Jonquière, who whilst cleansing a basin had dropped the large zinc water-can. And, despite their torment, this had made the patients laugh, like the simple souls they were, rendered puerile by suffering. However, Sister Hyacinthe, who rightly called them her children, children whom she governed with a word, at once set them saying the chaplet again, pending the Angelus, which would only be said at Châtellerault, in accordance with the predetermined programme. And thereupon the "Aves" followed one after the other, spreading into a confused murmuring and mumbling amidst the rattling of the coupling irons and noisy growling of the wheels.

Pierre had meantime relapsed into his reverie, and

beheld himself as he had been at six and twenty, when ordained a priest. Tardy scruples had come to him a few days before his ordination, a semi-consciousness that he was binding himself without having clearly questioned his heart and mind. But he had avoided doing so, living in the dizzy bewilderment of his decision, fancying that he had lopped off all human ties and feelings with a voluntary hatchet-stroke. His flesh had surely died with his childhood's innocent romance, that white-skinned girl with golden hair, whom now he never beheld otherwise than stretched upon her couch of suffering, her flesh as lifeless as his own. And he had afterwards made the sacrifice of his mind, which he then fancied even an easier one, hoping as he did that determination would suffice to prevent him from thinking. Besides, it was too late, he could not recoil at the last moment, and if when he pronounced the last solemn vow he felt a secret terror, an indeterminate but immense regret agitating him, he forgot everything, saving a divine reward for his efforts on the day when he afforded his mother the great and long-expected joy of hearing him say his first mass.

He could still see the poor woman in the little church of Neuilly, which she herself had selected, the church where the funeral service for his father had been celebrated ; he saw her on that cold November morning, kneeling almost alone in the dark little chapel, her hands hiding her face as she continued weeping whilst he raised the Host. It was there that she had tasted her last happiness, for she led a sad and lonely life, no longer seeing her elder

son, who had gone away, swayed by other ideas than her own, bent on breaking off all family intercourse since his brother intended to enter the Church. It was said that Guillaume, a chemist of great talent, like his father, but at the same time a Bohemian, addicted to revolutionary dreams, was living in a little house in the suburbs, where he devoted himself to the dangerous study of explosive substances; and folks added that he was living with a woman who had come no one knew whence. This it was which had severed the last tie between himself and his mother, all piety and propriety. For three years Pierre had not once seen Guillaume, whom in his childhood he had worshipped as a kind, merry, and fatherly big brother.

But there came an awful pang to his heart—he once more beheld his mother lying dead. This again was a thunderbolt, an illness of scarce three days' duration, a sudden passing away, as in the case of Madame de Guersaint. One evening, after a wild hunt for the doctor, he had found her motionless and quite white. She had died during his absence; and his lips had ever retained the icy thrill of the last kiss that he had given her. Of everything else—the vigil, the preparations, the funeral—he remembered nothing. All that had become lost in the black night of his stupor and grief, grief so extreme that he had almost died of it—seized with shivering on his return from the cemetery, struck down by a fever which during three weeks had kept him delirious, hovering between life and death. His brother had come and nursed him and had then

attended to pecuniary matters, dividing the little inheritance, leaving him the house and a modest income and taking his own share in money. And as soon as Guillaume had found him out of danger he had gone off again, once more vanishing into the unknown. But then through what a long convalescence he, Pierre, had passed, buried as it were in that deserted house. He had done nothing to detain Guillaume, for he realised that there was an abyss between them. At first the solitude had brought him suffering, but afterwards it had grown very pleasant, whether in the deep silence of the rooms which the rare noises of the street did not disturb, or under the screening, shady foliage of the little garden, where he could spend whole days without seeing a soul. His favourite place of refuge, however, was the old laboratory, his father's *cabinet*, which his mother for twenty years had kept carefully locked up, as though to immure within it all the incredulity and damnation of the past. And despite the gentleness, the respectful submissiveness which she had shown in former times, she would perhaps have some day ended by destroying all her husband's books and papers, had not death so suddenly surprised her. Pierre, however, had once more had the windows opened, the writing-table and the bookcase dusted; and, installed in the large leather arm-chair, he now spent delicious hours there, regenerated as it were by his illness, brought back to his youthful days again, deriving a wondrous intellectual delight from the perusal of the books which he came upon.

The only person whom he remembered having re-

ceived during those two months of slow recovery was Doctor Chassaigne, an old friend of his father, a medical man of real merit, who, with the one ambition of curing disease, modestly confined himself to the *rôle* of the practitioner. It was in vain that the doctor had sought to save Madame Froment, but he flattered himself that he had extricated the young priest from grievous danger; and he came to see him from time to time, to chat with him and cheer him, talking with him of his father, the great chemist, of whom he recounted many a charming anecdote, many a particular, still glowing with the flame of ardent friendship. Little by little, amidst the weak languor of convalescence, the son had thus beheld an embodiment of charming simplicity, affection, and good nature rising up before him. It was his father such as he had really been, not the man of stern science whom he had pictured whilst listening to his mother. Certainly she had never taught him aught but respect for that dear memory; but had not her husband been the unbeliever, the man who denied, and made the angels weep, the artisan of impiety who sought to change the world that God had made? And so he had long remained a gloomy vision, a spectre of damnation prowling about the house, whereas now he became the house's very light, clear and gay, a worker consumed by a longing for truth, who had never desired anything but the love and happiness of all. For his part, Doctor Chassaigne, a Pyrenean by birth, born in a far-off secluded village where folks still believed in sorceresses, inclined rather towards religion, although he had not set his

foot inside a church during the forty years he had been living in Paris. However, his conviction was absolute: if there were a heaven somewhere, Michel Froment was assuredly there, and not merely there, but seated upon a throne on the Divinity's right hand.

Then Pierre, in a few minutes, again lived through the frightful torment which, during two long months, had ravaged him. It was not that he had found controversial works of an anti-religious character in the bookcase, or that his father, whose papers he sorted, had ever gone beyond his techincal studies as a *savant*. But little by little, despite himself, the light of science dawned upon him, an *ensemble* of proven phenomena, which demolished dogmas and left within him nothing of the things which as a priest he should have believed. It seemed, in fact, as though illness had renewed him, as though he were again beginning to live and learn amidst the physical pleasantness of convalescence, that still subsisting weakness which lent penetrating lucidity to his brain. At the seminary, by the advice of his masters, he had always kept the spirit of inquiry, his thirst for knowledge, in check. Much of that which was taught him there had surprised him; however, he had succeeded in making the sacrifice of his mind required of his piety. But now, all the laboriously raised scaffolding of dogmas was swept away in a revolt of that sovereign mind which clamoured for its rights, and which he could no longer silence. Truth was bubbling up and overflowing in such an irresistible stream that he realised he would

never succeed in lodging error in his brain again. It was indeed the total and irreparable ruin of faith. Although he had been able to kill his flesh by renouncing the romance of his youth, although he felt that he had altogether mastered carnal passion, he now knew that it would be impossible for him to make the sacrifice of his intelligence. And he was not mistaken; it was indeed his father again springing to life in the depths of his being, and at last obtaining the mastery in that dual heredity in which, during so many years, his mother had dominated. The upper part of his face, his straight, towering brow, seemed to have risen yet higher, whilst the lower part, the small chin, the affectionate mouth, were becoming less distinct. However, he suffered; at certain twilight hours when his kindliness, his need of love awoke, he felt distracted with grief at no longer believing, distracted with desire to believe again; and it was necessary that the lighted lamp should be brought in, that he should see clearly around him and within him, before he could recover the energy and calmness of reason, the strength of martyrdom, the determination to sacrifice everything to the peace of his conscience.

Then came the crisis. He was a priest and he no longer believed. This had suddenly dawned before him like a bottomless abyss. It was the end of his life, the collapse of everything. What should he do? Did not simple rectitude require that he should throw off the cassock and return to the world? But he had seen some renegade priests and had despised them. A married priest with whom he was ac-

quainted filled him with disgust. All this, no doubt, was but a survival of his long religious training. He retained the notion that a priest cannot, must not, weaken ; the idea that when one has dedicated oneself to God one cannot take possession of oneself again. Possibly, also, he felt that he was too plainly branded, too different from other men already, to prove otherwise than awkward and unwelcome among them. Since he had been cut off from them he would remain apart in his grievous pride. And, after days of anguish, days of struggle incessantly renewed, in which his thirst for happiness warred with the energies of his returning health, he took the heroic resolution to remain a priest, and an honest one. He would find the strength necessary for such abnegation. Since he had conquered the flesh, albeit unable to conquer the brain, he felt sure of keeping his vow of chastity, and that would be unshakable ; therein lay the pure, upright life which he was absolutely certain of living. What mattered the rest if he alone suffered, if nobody in the world suspected that his heart was reduced to ashes, that nothing remained of his faith, that he was agonising amidst fearful falsehood ? His rectitude would prove a firm prop ; he would follow his priestly calling like an honest man, without breaking any of the vows he had taken; he would, in due accordance with the rites, discharge his duties as a minister of the Divinity, whom he would praise and glorify at the altar, and distribute as the Bread of Life to the faithful. Who, then, would dare to impute his loss of faith to him as a crime, even if this

great misfortune should some day become known? And what more could be asked of him than lifelong devotion to his vow, regard for his ministry, and the practice of every charity without the hope of any future reward? In this wise he ended by calming himself, still upright, still bearing his head erect, with the desolate grandeur of the priest who himself no longer believes, but continues watching over the faith of others. And he certainly was not alone; he felt that he had many brothers, priests with ravaged minds, who had sunk into incredulity, and who yet, like soldiers without a fatherland, remained at the altar, and, despite everything, found the courage to make the divine illusion shine forth above the kneeling crowds.

On recovering his health Pierre had immediately resumed his service at the little church of Neuilly. He said his mass there every morning. But he had resolved to refuse any appointment, any preferment. Months and years went by, and he obstinately insisted on remaining the least known and the most humble of those priests who are tolerated in a parish, who appear and disappear after discharging their duty. The acceptance of any appointment would have seemed to him an aggravation of his falsehood, a theft from those who were more deserving than himself. And he had to resist frequent offers, for it was impossible for his merits to remain unnoticed. Indeed, his obstinate modesty provoked astonishment at the archbishop's palace, where there was a desire to utilise the power which could be divined in him. Now and again, it is true, he bitterly regretted that

he was not useful, that he did not co-operate in some great work, in furthering the purification of the world, the salvation and happiness of all, in accordance with his own ardent, torturing desire. Fortunately his time was nearly all his own, and to console himself he gave rein to his passion for work by devouring every volume in his father's bookcase, and then again resuming and considering his studies, feverishly preoccupied with regard to the history of nations, full of a desire to explore the depths of the social and religious crisis so that he might ascertain whether it were really beyond remedy.

It was at this time, whilst rummaging one morning in one of the large drawers in the lower part of the bookcase, that he discovered quite a collection of papers respecting the apparitions of Lourdes. It was a very complete set of documents, comprising detailed notes of the interrogatories to which Bernadette had been subjected, copies of numerous official documents, and police and medical reports, in addition to many private and confidential letters of the greatest interest. This discovery had surprised Pierre, and he had questioned Doctor Chassaigne concerning it. The latter thereupon remembered that his friend, Michel Froment, had at one time passionately devoted himself to the study of Bernadette's case ; and he himself, a native of the village near Lourdes, had procured for the chemist a portion of the documents in the collection. Pierre, in his turn, then became impassioned, and for a whole month continued studying the affair, powerfully attracted by the visionary's pure, upright nature, but

indignant with all that had subsequently sprouted up—the barbarous fetishism, the painful superstitions, and the triumphant simony. In the access of unbelief which had come upon him, this story of Lourdes was certainly of a nature to complete the collapse of his faith. However, it had also excited his curiosity, and he would have liked to investigate it, to establish beyond dispute what scientific truth might be in it, and render pure Christianity the service of ridding it of this scoria, this fairy tale, all touching and childish as it was. But he had been obliged to relinquish his studies, shrinking from the necessity of making a journey to the Grotto, and finding that it would be extremely difficult to obtain the information which he still needed ; and of it all there at last only remained within him a tender feeling for Bernadette, of whom he could not think without a sensation of delightful charm and infinite pity.

The days went by, and Pierre led a more and more lonely life. Doctor Chassaigne had just left for the Pyrenees in a state of mortal anxiety. Abandoning his patients, he had set out for Cauterets with his ailing wife, who was sinking more and more each day, to the infinite distress of both his charming daughter and himself. From that moment the little house at Neuilly fell into deathlike silence and emptiness. Pierre had no other distraction than that of occasionally going to see the Guersaints, who had long since left the neighbouring house, but whom he had found again in a small lodging in a wretched tenement of the district. And the memory of his

first visit to them there was yet so fresh within him, that he felt a pang at his heart as he recalled his emotion at sight of the hapless Marie.

That pang roused him from his reverie, and on looking round he perceived Marie stretched on the seat, even as he had found her on the day which he recalled, already imprisoned in that gutter-like box, that coffin to which wheels were adapted when she was taken out-of-doors for an airing. She, formerly so brimful of life, ever astir and laughing, was dying of inaction and immobility in that box. Of her old-time beauty she had retained nothing save her hair, which clad her as with a royal mantle, and she was so emaciated that she seemed to have grown smaller again, to have become once more a child. And what was most distressing was the expression on her pale face, the blank, frigid stare of her eyes which did not see, the ever haunting absent look, as of one whom suffering overwhelmed. However, she noticed that Pierre was gazing at her, and at once desired to smile at him; but irresistible moans escaped her, and when she did at last smile, it was like a poor smitten creature who is convinced that she will expire before the miracle takes place. He was overcome by it, and, amidst all the sufferings with which the carriage abounded, hers were now the only ones that he beheld and heard, as though one and all were summed up in her, in the long and terrible agony of her beauty, gaiety, and youth.

Then by degrees, without taking his eyes from Marie, he again reverted to former days, again lived those hours, fraught with a mournful and bitter

charm, which he had often spent beside her, when he called at the sorry lodging to keep her company. M. de Guersaint had finally ruined himself by trying to improve the artistic quality of the religious prints so widely sold in France, the faulty execution of which quite irritated him. His last resources had been swallowed up in the failure of a colour-printing firm ; and, heedless as he was, deficient in foresight, ever trusting in Providence, his childish mind continually swayed by illusions, he did not notice the awful pecuniary embarrassment of the household ; but applied himself to the study of aërial navigation, without even realising what prodigious activity his elder daughter, Blanche, was forced to display, in order to earn the living of her two children, as she was wont to call her father and her sister. It was Blanche who, by running about Paris in the dust or the mud from morning to evening in order to give French or music lessons, contrived to provide the money necessary for the unremitting attentions which Marie required. And Marie often experienced attacks of despair—bursting into tears and accusing herself of being the primary cause of their ruin, as for years and years now it had been necessary to pay for medical attendance and for taking her to almost every imaginable spring—La Bourboule, Aix, Lamalou, Amélie-les-Bains, and others. And the outcome of ten years of varied diagnosis and treatment was that the doctors had now abandoned her. Some thought her illness to be due to the rupture of certain ligaments, others believed in the presence of a tumour, others again to paralysis due to

injury to the spinal cord, and as she, with maidenly revolt, refused to undergo any examination, and they did not even dare to address precise questions to her, they each contented themselves with their several opinions and declared that she was beyond cure. Moreover, she now solely relied upon the divine help, having grown rigidly pious since she had been suffering, and finding her only relief in her ardent faith. Every morning she herself read the holy offices, for to her great sorrow she was unable to go to church. Her inert limbs indeed seemed quite lifeless, and she had sunk into a condition of extreme weakness, to such a point, in fact, that on certain days it became necessary for her sister to place her food in her mouth.

Pierre was thinking of this when all at once he recalled an evening he had spent with her. The lamp had not yet been lighted, he was seated beside her in the growing obscurity, and she suddenly told him that she wished to go to Lourdes, feeling certain that she would return cured. He had experienced an uncomfortable sensation on hearing her speak in this fashion, and quite forgetting himself had exclaimed that it was folly to believe in such childishness. He had hitherto made it a rule never to converse with her on religious matters, having not only refused to be her confessor, but even to advise her with regard to the petty uncertainties of her pietism. In this respect he was influenced by feelings of mingled shame and compassion; to lie to her of all people would have made him suffer, and, moreover, he would have deemed himself a criminal had he even

by a breath sullied that fervent pure faith which lent her such strength against pain. And so, regretting that he had not been able to restrain his exclamation, he remained sorely embarrassed, when all at once he felt the girl's cold hand take hold of his own. And then, emboldened by the darkness, she ventured in a gentle, faltering voice, to tell him that she already knew his secret, his misfortune, that wretchedness, so fearful for a priest, of being unable to believe.

Despite himself he had revealed everything during their chats together, and she, with the delicate intuition of a friend, had been able to read his conscience. She felt terribly distressed on his account; she deemed him, with that mortal moral malady, to be more deserving of pity than herself. And then as he, thunderstruck, was still unable to find an answer, acknowledging the truth of her words by his very silence, she again began to speak to him of Lourdes, adding in a low whisper that she wished to confide him as well as herself to the protection of the Blessed Virgin, whom she entreated to restore him to faith. And from that evening forward she did not cease speaking on the subject, repeating again and again, that if she went to Lourdes she would be surely cured. But she was prevented from making the journey by lack of means and she did not even dare to speak to her sister of the pecuniary question. So two months went by, and day by day she grew weaker, exhausted by her longing dreams, her eyes ever turned towards the flashing light of the miraculous Grotto far away. Pierre then experienced many

painful days. He had at first told Marie that he would not accompany her. But his decision was somewhat shaken by the thought that if he made up his mind to go, he might profit by the journey to continue his inquiries with regard to Bernadette, whose charming image lingered in his heart. And at last he even felt penetrated by a delightful feeling, an unacknowledged hope, the hope that Marie was perhaps right, that the Virgin might take pity on him and restore to him his former blind faith, the faith of the child who loves and does not question. Oh ! to believe, to believe with his whole soul, to plunge into faith for ever ! Doubtless there was no other possible happiness. He longed for faith with all the joyousness of his youth, with all the love that he had felt for his mother, with all his burning desire to escape from the torment of understanding and knowing, and to slumber forever in the depths of divine ignorance. It was cowardly, and yet so delightful ; to exist no more, to become a mere thing in the hands of the Divinity. And thus he was at last possessed by a desire to make the supreme experiment.

A week later the journey to Lourdes was decided upon. Pierre, however, had insisted on a final consultation of medical men in order to ascertain if it were really possible for Marie to travel ; and this again was a scene which rose up before him, with certain incidents which he ever beheld whilst others were already fading from his mind. Two of the doctors who had formerly attended the patient, and one of whom believed in the rupture of certain liga-

ments, whilst the other asserted the case to be one of medullary paralysis, had ended by agreeing that this paralysis existed, and that there was also, possibly, some ligamentary injury. In their opinion all the symptoms pointed to this diagnosis, and the nature of the case seemed to them so evident that they did not hesitate to give certificates, each his own, agreeing almost word for word with one another, and so positive in character as to leave no room for doubt. Moreover, they thought that the journey was practicable, though it would certainly prove an exceedingly painful one. Pierre thereupon resolved to risk it, for he had found the doctors very prudent, and very desirous to arrive at the truth; and he retained but a confused recollection of the third medical man who had been called in, a distant cousin of his named De Beauclair, who was young, extremely intelligent, but little known as yet, and said by some to be rather strange in his theories. This doctor, after looking at Marie for a long time, had asked somewhat anxiously about her parents, and had seemed greatly interested by what was told him of M. de Guersaint, this architect and inventor with a weak and exuberant mind. Then he had desired to measure the sufferer's visual field, and by a slight discreet touch had ascertained the locality of the pain, which, under certain pressure, seemed to ascend like a heavy shifting mass towards the breast. He did not appear to attach importance to the paralysis of the legs; but on a direct question being put to him he exclaimed that the girl ought to be taken to Lourdes and that she would assuredly be cured there, if she herself

were convinced of it. Faith sufficed, said he, with a smile; two pious lady patients of his, whom he had sent thither during the preceding year, had returned in radiant health. He even predicted how the miracle would come about; it would be like a lightning stroke, an awakening, an exaltation of the entire being, whilst the evil, that horrid, diabolical weight which stifled the poor girl would once more ascend and fly away as though emerging by her mouth. But at the same time he flatly declined to give a certificate. He had failed to agree with his two *confrères*, who treated him coldly, as though they considered him a wild, adventurous young fellow. Pierre confusedly remembered some shreds of the discussion which had begun again in his presence, some little part of the diagnosis framed by Beauclair. First, a dislocation of the organ, with a slight laceration of the ligaments, resulting from the patient's fall from her horse; then a slow healing, everything returning to its place, followed by consecutive nervous symptoms, so that the sufferer was now simply beset by her original fright, her attention fixed on the injured part, arrested there amidst increasing pain, incapable of acquiring fresh notions unless it were under the lash of some violent emotion. Moreover, he also admitted the probability of accidents due to nutrition, as yet unexplained, and on the course and importance of which he himself would not venture to give an opinion. However, the idea that Marie *dreamt* her disease, that the fearful sufferings torturing her came from an injury long since healed, appeared such a paradox to Pierre when he

gazed at her and saw her in such agony, her limbs already stretched out lifeless on her bed of misery, that he did not even pause to consider it ; but at that moment felt simply happy in the thought that all three doctors agreed in authorising the journey to Lourdes. To him it was sufficient that she *might* be cured, and to attain that result he would have followed her to the end of the world.

Ah ! those last days of Paris, amid what a scramble they were spent ! The national pilgrimage was about to start, and in order to avoid heavy expenses, it had occurred to him to obtain *hospitalisation* for Marie. Then he had been obliged to run about in order to obtain his own admission, as a helper, into the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation. M. de Guersaint was delighted with the prospect of the journey, for he was fond of nature, and ardently desired to become acquainted with the Pyrenees. Moreover, he did not allow anything to worry him, but was perfectly willing that the young priest should pay his railway fare, and provide for him at the hotel yonder as for a child ; and his daughter Blanche, having slipped a twenty-franc piece into his hand at the last moment, he had even thought himself rich again. That poor brave Blanche had a little hidden store of her own, savings to the amount of fifty francs, which it had been absolutely necessary to accept, for she became quite angry in her determination to contribute towards her sister's cure, unable as she was to form one of the party, owing to the lessons which she had to give in Paris, whose hard pavements she must continue pacing, whilst her dear ones were kneeling yonder, amidst the enchantments of the Grotto.

And so the others had started on, and were now rolling, ever rolling along.

As they passed the station of Châtellerault a sudden burst of voices made Pierre start, and drove away the torpor into which his reverie had plunged him. What was the matter? Were they reaching Poitiers? But it was only half-past twelve o'clock, and it was simply Sister Hyacinthe who had roused him, by making her patients and pilgrims say the Angelus, the three "Aves" thrice repeated. Then the voices burst forth, and the sound of a fresh canticle arose, and continued like a lamentation. Fully five and twenty minutes must elapse before they would reach Poitiers, where it seemed as if the half-hour's stoppage would bring relief to every suffering! They were all so uncomfortable, so roughly shaken in that malodorous, burning carriage! Such wretchedness was beyond endurance. Big tears coursed down the cheeks of Madame Vincent, a muttered oath escaped M. Sabathier usually so resigned, and Brother Isidore, La Grivotte, and Madame Vêtu seemed to have become inanimate, mere waifs carried along by a torrent. Moreover, Marie no longer answered, but had closed her eyes and would not open them, pursued as she was by the horrible vision of Elise Rouquet's face, that face with its gaping cavities which seemed to her to be the image of death. And whilst the train increased its speed, bearing all this human despair onward, under the heavy sky, athwart the burning plains, there was yet another scare in the carriage. The strange man had apparently ceased to breathe, and a voice cried out that he was expiring.

III

POITIERS

As soon as the train arrived at Poitiers, Sister Hyacinthe alighted in all haste, amidst the crowd of porters opening the carriage doors, and of pilgrims darting forward to reach the platform. "Wait a moment, wait a moment," she repeated, "let me pass first. I wish to see if all is over."

Then, having entered the other compartment, she raised the strange man's head, and seeing him so pale, with such blank eyes, she did at first think him already dead. At last, however, she detected a faint breathing. "No, no," she then exclaimed, "he still breathes. Quick! there is no time to be lost." And, perceiving the other Sister, she added: "Sister Claire des Anges, will you go and fetch Father Massias, who must be in the third or fourth carriage of the train? Tell him that we have a patient in very great danger here, and ask him to bring the Holy Oils at once."

Without answering, the other Sister at once plunged into the midst of the scramble. She was small, slender, and gentle, with a meditative air and mysterious eyes, but withal extremely active.

Pierre, who was standing in the other compartment watching the scene, now ventured to make a suggestion : "And would it not be as well to fetch the doctor ?" said he.

"Yes, I was thinking of it," replied Sister Hyacinthe, "and, Monsieur l'Abbé, it would be very kind of you to go for him yourself."

It so happened that Pierre intended going to the cantine carriage to fetch some broth for Marie. Now that she was no longer being jolted she felt somewhat relieved, and had opened her eyes, and caused her father to raise her to a sitting posture. Keenly thirsting for fresh air, she would have much liked them to carry her out on to the platform for a moment, but she felt that it would be asking too much, that it would be too troublesome a task to place her inside the carriage again. So M. de Guersaint remained by himself on the platform, near the open door, smoking a cigarette, whilst Pierre hastened to the cantine van, where he knew he would find the doctor on duty, with his travelling pharmacy.

Some other patients, whom one could not think of removing, also remained in the carriage. Amongst them was La Grivotte, who was stifling and almost delirious, in such a state indeed as to detain Madame de Jonquière, who had arranged to meet her daughter Raymonde, with Madame Volmar and Madame Désagneaux, in the refreshment-room, in order that they might all four lunch together. But that unfortunate creature seemed on the point of expiring, so how could she leave her all alone, on the hard seat of that carriage ? On his side, M. Sabathier,

likewise riveted to his seat, was waiting for his wife, who had gone to fetch a bunch of grapes for him; whilst Marthe had remained with her brother the missionary, whose faint moan never ceased. The others, those who were able to walk, had hustled one another in their haste to alight, all eager as they were to escape for a moment from that cage of wretchedness where their limbs had been quite numbed by the seven hours' journey which they had so far gone. Madame Maze had at once drawn apart, straying with melancholy face to the far end of the platform, where she found herself all alone; Madame Vêtu, stupefied by her sufferings, had found sufficient strength to take a few steps, and sit down on a bench, in the full sunlight, where she did not even feel the burning heat; whilst Elise Rouquet, who had had the decency to cover her face with a black wrap, and was consumed by a desire for fresh water, went hither and thither in search of a drinking fountain. And meantime Madame Vincent, walking slowly, carried her little Rose about in her arms, trying to smile at her, and to cheer her by showing her some gaudily coloured picture bills, which the child gravely gazed at, but did not see.

Pierre had the greatest possible difficulty in making his way through the crowd inundating the platform. No effort of imagination could enable one to picture the living torrent of ailing and healthy beings which the train had here set down—a mob of more than a thousand persons just emerging from suffocation, and bustling, hurrying hither and thither.

Each carriage had contributed its share of wretchedness, like some hospital ward suddenly evacuated; and it was now possible to form an idea of the frightful amount of suffering which this terrible white train carried along with it, this train which disseminated a legend of horror wheresoever it passed. Some infirm sufferers were dragging themselves about, others were being carried, and many remained in a heap on the platform. There were sudden pushes, violent calls, innumerable displays of distracted eagerness to reach the refreshment-room and the *buvette*. Each and all made haste, going wheresoever their wants called them. This stoppage of half an hour's duration, the only stoppage there would be before reaching Lourdes, was, after all, such a short one. And the only gay note, amidst all the black cassocks and the threadbare garments of the poor, never of any precise shade of colour, was supplied by the smiling whiteness of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, all bright and active in their snowy coifs, wimples, and aprons.

When Pierre at last reached the cantine van near the middle of the train, he found it already besieged. There was here a petroleum stove, with a small supply of cooking utensils. The broth prepared from concentrated meat-extract was being warmed in wrought-iron pans, whilst the preserved milk in tins was diluted and supplied as occasion required. There were some other provisions, such as biscuits, fruit, and chocolate, on a few shelves. But Sister Saint-François, to whom the service was entrusted, a short, stout woman of five-and-forty, with a good-

natured fresh-coloured face, was somewhat losing her head in the presence of all the hands so eagerly stretched towards her. Whilst continuing her distribution, she lent ear to Pierre, as he called the doctor, who with his travelling pharmacy occupied another corner of the van. Then, when the young priest began to explain matters, speaking of the poor unknown man who was dying, a sudden desire came to her to go and see him, and she summoned another Sister to take her place.

"Oh! I wished to ask you, Sister, for some broth for a passenger who is ill," said Pierre, at that moment turning towards her.

"Very well, Monsieur l'Abbé, I will bring some. Go on in front."

The doctor and the abbé went off in all haste, rapidly questioning and answering one another, whilst behind them followed Sister Saint-François, carrying the bowl of broth with all possible caution amidst the jostling of the crowd. The doctor was a dark-complexioned man of eight-and-twenty, robust and extremely handsome, with the head of a young Roman emperor, such as may still be occasionally met with in the sunburnt land of Provence. As soon as Sister Hyacinthe caught sight of him, she raised an exclamation of surprise: "What! Monsieur Ferrand, is it you?" Indeed, they both seemed amazed at meeting in this manner.

It is, however, the courageous mission of the Sisters of the Assumption to tend the ailing poor, those who lie in agony in their humble garrets, and cannot pay for nursing; and thus these good women spend their lives among the wretched, installing themselves

beside the sufferer's pallet in his tiny lodging, and ministering to every want, attending alike to cooking and cleaning, and living there as servants and relatives, until either cure or death supervenes. And it was in this wise that Sister Hyacinthe, young as she was, with her milky face, and her blue eyes which ever laughed, had installed herself one day in the abode of this young fellow, Ferrand, then a medical student, prostrated by typhoid fever, and so desperately poor that he lived in a kind of loft reached by a ladder, in the Rue du Four. And from that moment she had not stirred from his side, but had remained with him until she cured him, with the passion of one who lived only for others, one who when an infant had been found in a church porch, and who had no other family than that of those who suffered, to whom she devoted herself with all her ardently affectionate nature. And what a delightful month, what exquisite comradeship, fraught with the pure fraternity of suffering, had followed! When he called her "Sister," it was really to a sister that he was speaking. And she was a mother also, a mother who helped him to rise, and who put him to bed as though he were her child, without aught springing up between them save supreme pity, the divine, gentle compassion of charity. She ever showed herself gay, sexless, devoid of any instinct excepting that which prompted her to assuage and to console. And he worshipped her, venerated her, and had retained of her the most chaste and passionate of recollections.

"O Sister Hyacinthe!" he murmured in delight. Chance alone had brought them face to face again,

for Ferrand was not a believer, and if he found himself in that train it was simply because he had at the last moment consented to take the place of a friend who was suddenly prevented from coming. For nearly a twelvemonth he had been a house-surgeon at the Hospital of La Pitié. However, this journey to Lourdes, in such peculiar circumstances, greatly interested him.

The joy of the meeting was making them forget the ailing stranger. And so the Sister resumed: "You see, Monsieur Ferrand, it is for this man that we want you. At one moment we thought him dead. Ever since we passed Amboise he has been filling us with fear, and I have just sent for the Holy Oils. Do you find him so very low? Could you not revive him a little?"

The doctor was already examining the man, and thereupon the sufferers who had remained in the carriage became greatly interested and began to look. Marie, to whom Sister Saint-François had given the bowl of broth, was holding it with such an unsteady hand that Pierre had to take it from her, and endeavour to make her drink; but she could not swallow, and she left the broth scarce tasted, fixing her eyes upon the man waiting to see what would happen like one whose own existence is at stake.

"Tell me," again asked Sister Hyacinthe, "how do you find him? What is his illness?"

"What is his illness!" muttered Ferrand; "he has every illness."

Then, drawing a little phial from his pocket, he

endeavoured to introduce a few drops of the contents between the sufferer's clenched teeth. The man heaved a sigh, raised his eyelids and let them fall again; that was all, he gave no other sign of life.

Sister Hyacinthe, usually so calm and composed, so little accustomed to despair, became impatient. "But it is terrible," said she, "and Sister Claire des Anges does not come back! Yet I told her plainly enough where she would find Father Massias's carriage. *Mon Dieu!* what will become of us?"

Sister Saint-François, seeing that she could render no help, was now about to return to the cantine van. Before doing so, however, she inquired if the man were not simply dying of hunger; for such cases presented themselves, and indeed she had only come to the compartment with the view of offering some of her provisions. At last, as she went off, she promised that she would make Sister Claire des Anges hasten her return should she happen to meet her; and she had not gone twenty yards when she turned round and waved her arm to call attention to her colleague, who with discreet short steps was coming back alone.

Leaning out of the window, Sister Hyacinthe kept on calling to her, "Make haste, make haste! Well, and where is Father Massias?"

"He is n't there."

"What! not there?"

"No. I went as fast as I could, but with all these people about it was not possible to get there quickly. When I reached the carriage Father Massias had

already alighted, and gone out of the station, no doubt."

She thereupon explained, that according to what she had heard, Father Massias and the priest of Sainte-Radegonde had some appointment together. In other years the national pilgrimage halted at Poitiers for four-and-twenty hours, and after those who were ill had been placed in the town hospital the others went in procession to Sainte-Radegonde.[1] That year, however, there was some obstacle to this course being followed, so the train was going straight on to Lourdes; and Father Massias was certainly with his friend the priest, talking with him on some matter of importance.

"They promised to tell him and send him here with the Holy Oils as soon as they found him," added Sister Claire.

However, this was quite a disaster for Sister Hyacinthe. Since Science was powerless, perhaps the

[1] The church of Sainte-Radegonde, built by the saint of that name in the sixth century, is famous throughout Poitou. In the crypt between the tombs of Ste. Agnes and St. Disciole is that of Ste. Radegonde herself, but it now only contains some particles of her remains, as the greater portion was burnt by the Huguenots in 1562. On a previous occasion (1412) the tomb had been violated by Jean, Duc de Berry, who wished to remove both the saint's head and her two rings. Whilst he was making the attempt, however, the skeleton is said to have withdrawn its hand so that he might not possess himself of the rings. A greater curiosity which the church contains is a footprint on a stone slab, said to have been left by Christ when He appeared to Ste. Radegonde in her cell. This attracts pilgrims from many parts.—*Trans.*

Holy Oils would have brought the sufferer some relief. She had often seen that happen.

"O Sister, Sister, how worried I am!" she said to her companion. "Do you know, I wish you would go back and watch for Father Massias and bring him to me as soon as you see him. It would be so kind of you to do so!"

"Yes, Sister," compliantly answered Sister Claire des Anges, and off she went again with that grave, mysterious air of hers, wending her way through the crowd like a gliding shadow.

Ferrand, meantime, was still looking at the man, sorely distressed at his inability to please Sister Hyacinthe by reviving him. And as he made a gesture expressive of his powerlessness she again raised her voice entreatingly: "Stay with me, Monsieur Ferrand, pray stay," she said. "Wait till Father Massias comes—I shall be a little more at ease with you here."

He remained and helped her to raise the man, who was slipping down upon the seat. Then, taking a linen cloth, she wiped the poor fellow's face which a dense perspiration was continually covering. And the spell of waiting continued amid the uneasiness of the patients who had remained in the carriage, and the curiosity of the folks who had begun to assemble on the platform in front of the compartment.

All at once however a girl hastily pushed the crowd aside, and, mounting on the footboard, addressed herself to Madame de Jonquière: "What is the matter, mamma?" she said. "They are waiting for you in the refreshment-room."

It was Raymonde de Jonquière, who, already somewhat ripe for her four-and-twenty years, was remarkably like her mother, being very dark, with a pronounced nose, large mouth, and full, pleasant-looking face.

"But, my dear, you can see for yourself. I can't leave this poor woman," replied the lady-hospitaller; and thereupon she pointed to La Grivotte, who had been attacked by a fit of coughing which shook her frightfully.

"Oh, how annoying, mamma!" retorted Raymonde, "Madame Désagneaux and Madame Volmar were looking forward with so much pleasure to this little lunch together."

"Well, it can't be helped, my dear. At all events, you can begin without waiting for me. Tell the ladies that I will come and join them as soon as I can." Then, an idea occurring to her, Madame de Jonquière added: "Wait a moment, the doctor is here. I will try to get him to take charge of my patient. Go back, I will follow you. As you can guess, I am dying of hunger."

Raymonde briskly returned to the refreshment-room whilst her mother begged Ferrand to come into her compartment to see if he could do something to relieve La Grivotte. At Marthe's request he had already examined Brother Isidore, whose moaning never ceased; and with a sorrowful gesture he had again confessed his powerlessness. However, he hastened to comply with Madame de Jonquière's appeal, and raised the consumptive woman to a sitting posture in the hope of thus stopping her cough,

which indeed gradually ceased. And then he helped the lady-hospitaller to make her swallow a spoonful of some soothing draught. The doctor's presence in the carriage was still causing a stir among the ailing ones. M. Sabathier, who was slowly eating the grapes which his wife had been to fetch him, did not, however, question Ferrand, for he knew full well what his answer would be, and was weary, as he expressed it, of consulting all the princes of science; nevertheless he felt comforted as it were at seeing him set that poor consumptive woman on her feet again. And even Marie watched all that the doctor did with increasing interest, though not daring to call him herself, certain as she also was that he could do nothing for her.

Meantime, the crush on the platform was increasing. Only a quarter of an hour now remained to the pilgrims. Madame Vêtu, whose eyes were open but who saw nothing, sat like an insensible being in the broad sunlight, in the hope possibly that the scorching heat would deaden her pains; whilst up and down, in front of her, went Madame Vincent ever with the same sleep-inducing step and ever carrying her little Rose, her poor ailing birdie, whose weight was so trifling that she scarcely felt her in her arms. Many people meantime were hastening to the water tap in order to fill their pitchers, cans, and bottles. Madame Maze, who was of refined tastes and careful of her person, thought of going to wash her hands there; but just as she arrived she found Elise Rouquet drinking, and she recoiled at sight of that disease-smitten face, so terribly disfigured and robbed

of nearly all semblance of humanity. And all the others likewise shuddered, likewise hesitated to fill their bottles, pitchers, and cans at the tap from which she had drunk.

A large number of pilgrims had now begun to eat whilst pacing the platform. You could hear the rhythmical taps of the crutches carried by a woman who incessantly wended her way through the groups. On the ground, a legless cripple was painfully dragging herself about in search of nobody knew what. Others, seated there in heaps, no longer stirred. All these sufferers, momentarily unpacked as it were, these patients of a travelling hospital emptied for a brief half-hour, were taking the air amidst the bewilderment and agitation of the healthy passengers; and the whole throng had a frightfully woeful, poverty-stricken appearance in the broad noontide light.

Pierre no longer stirred from the side of Marie, for M. de Guersaint had disappeared, attracted by a verdant patch of landscape which could be seen at the far end of the station. And, feeling anxious about her, since she had not been able to finish her broth, the young priest with a smiling air tried to tempt her palate by offering to go and buy her a peach; but she refused it; she was suffering too much, she cared for nothing. She was gazing at him with her large, woeful eyes, on the one hand impatient at this stoppage which delayed her chance of cure, and on the other terrified at the thought of again being jolted along that hard and endless railroad.

Just then a stout gentleman whose full beard was

turning grey, and who had a broad, fatherly kind of face, drew near and touched Pierre's arm : " Excuse me, Monsieur l'Abbé," said he, " but is it not in this carriage that there is a poor man dying ? "

And on the priest returning an affirmative answer, the gentleman became quite affable and familiar. " My name is Vigneron," he said ; " I am the head clerk at the Ministry of Finances, and applied for leave in order that I might help my wife to take our son Gustave to Lourdes. The dear lad places all his hope in the Blessed Virgin, to whom we pray morning and evening on his behalf. We are in a second-class compartment of the carriage just in front of yours."

Then, turning round, he summoned his party with a wave of the hand. " Come, come! " said he, " it *is* here. The unfortunate man is indeed in the last throes."

Madame Vigneron was a litttle woman with the correct bearing of a respectable *bourgeoise*, but her long, livid face denoted impoverished blood, terrible evidence of which was furnished by her son Gustave. The latter, who was fifteen years of age, looked scarcely ten. Twisted out of shape, he was a mere skeleton, with his right leg so wasted, so reduced, that he had to walk with a crutch. He had a small, thin face, somewhat awry, in which one saw little excepting his eyes, clear eyes, sparkling with intelligence, sharpened as it were by suffering, and doubtless well able to dive into the human soul.

An old puffy-faced lady followed the others, dragging her legs along with difficulty ; and M. Vigne-

ering that he had forgotten her, stepped
s Pierre so that he might complete the
n. "That lady," said he, "is Madame
y wife's eldest sister. She also wished to
ny Gustave, whom she is very fond of,"
And then, leaning forward, he added in a whisper, with a confidential air: "She is the widow of Chaise, the silk merchant, you know, who left such an immense fortune. She is suffering from a heart complaint which causes her much anxiety."

The whole family, grouped together, then gazed with lively curiosity at what was taking place in the railway carriage. People were incessantly flocking to the spot; and so that the lad might be the better able to see, his father took him up in his arms for a moment whilst his aunt held the crutch, and his mother on her side raised herself on tip-toe.

The scene in the carriage was still the same; the strange man was still stiffly seated in his corner, his head resting against the hard wood. He was livid, his eyes were closed, and his mouth was twisted by suffering; and every now and then Sister Hyacinthe with her linen cloth wiped away the cold sweat which was constantly covering his face. She no longer spoke, no longer evinced any impatience, but had recovered her serenity and relied on Heaven. From time to time she would simply glance towards the platform to see if Father Massias were coming.

"Look at him, Gustave," said M. Vigneron to his son; "he must be consumptive."

The lad, whom scrofula was eating away, whose hip was attacked by an abscess, and in whom there

were already signs of necrosis of the vertebræ, seemed to take a passionate interest in the agony he thus beheld. It did not frighten him, he smiled at it with a smile of infinite sadness.

"Oh! how dreadful!" muttered Madame Chaise, who, living in continual terror of a sudden attack which would carry her off, turned pale with the fear of death.

"Ah! well," replied M. Vigneron, philosophically, "it will come to each of us in turn. We are all mortal."

Thereupon, a painful, mocking expression came over Gustave's smile, as though he had heard other words than those—perchance an unconscious wish, the hope that the old aunt might die before he himself did, that he would inherit the promised half-million of francs, and then not long encumber his family.

"Put the boy down now," said Madame Vigneron to her husband. "You are tiring him, holding him by the legs like that."

Then both she and Madame Chaise bestirred themselves in order that the lad might not be shaken. The poor darling was so much in need of care and attention. At each moment they feared that they might lose him. Even his father was of opinion that they had better put him in the train again at once. And as the two women went off with the child, the old gentleman once more turned towards Pierre, and with evident emotion exclaimed: "Ah! Monsieur l'Abbé, if God should take him from us, the light of our life would be extinguished—I don't speak of his aunt's fortune, which would go to other nephews.

But it would be unnatural, would it not, that he should go off before her, especially as she is so ill? However, we are all in the hands of Providence, and place our reliance in the Blessed Virgin, who will assuredly perform a miracle."

Just then Madame de Jonquière, having been reassured by Doctor Ferrand, was able to leave La Grivotte. Before going off, however, she took care to say to Pierre: "I am dying of hunger and am going to the refreshment-room for a moment. But if my patient should begin coughing again, pray come and fetch me."

When, after great difficulty, she had managed to cross the platform and reach the refreshment-room, she found herself in the midst of another scramble. The better-circumstanced pilgrims had taken the tables by assault, and a great many priests were to be seen hastily lunching amidst all the clatter of knives, forks, and crockery. The three or four waiters were not able to attend to all the requirements, especially as they were hampered in their movements by the crowd purchasing fruit, bread, and cold meat at the counter. It was at a little table at the far end of the room that Raymonde was lunching with Madame Désagneaux and Madame Volmar.

"Ah! here you are at last, mamma!" the girl exclaimed, as Madame de Jonquière approached. "I was just going back to fetch you. You certainly ought to be allowed time to eat!"

She was laughing, with a very animated expression on her face, quite delighted as she was with the

adventures of the journey and this indifferent scrambling meal. "There," said she, "I have kept you some trout with green sauce, and there 's a cutlet also waiting for you. We have already got to the artichokes."

Then everything became charming. The gaiety prevailing in that little corner rejoiced the sight.

Young Madame Désagneaux was particularly adorable. A delicate blonde, with wild, wavy, yellow hair, a round, dimpled, milky face, a gay, laughing disposition, and a remarkably good heart, she had made a rich marriage, and for three years past had been wont to leave her husband at Trouville in the fine August weather, in order to accompany the national pilgrimage as a lady-hospitaller. This was her great passion, an access of quivering pity, a longing desire to place herself unreservedly at the disposal of the sick for five days, a real debauch of devotion from which she returned tired to death but full of intense delight. Her only regret was that she as yet had no children, and with comical passion, she occasionally expressed a regret that she had missed her true vocation, that of a sister of charity.

"Ah ! my dear," she hastily said to Raymonde, "don't pity your mother for being so much taken up with her patients. She, at all events, has something to occupy her." And addressing herself to Madame de Jonquière, she added : "If you only knew how long we find the time in our fine first-class carriage. We cannot even occupy ourselves with a little needlework, as it is forbidden. I asked for a place

with the patients, but all were already distributed, so that my only resource will be to try to sleep to-night."

She began to laugh, and then resumed: "Yes, Madame Volmar, we will try to sleep, won't we, since talking seems to tire you?" Madame Volmar, who looked over thirty, was very dark, with a long face and delicate but drawn features. Her magnificent eyes shone out like brasiers, though every now and then a cloud seemed to veil and extinguish them. At the first glance she did not appear beautiful, but as you gazed at her she became more and more perturbing, till she conquered you and inspired you with passionate admiration. It should be said though that she shrank from all self-assertion, comporting herself with much modesty, ever keeping in the background, striving to hide her lustre, invariably clad in black and unadorned by a single jewel, although she was the wife of a Parisian diamond-merchant.

"Oh! for my part," she murmured, "as long as I am not hustled too much I am well pleased."

She had been to Lourdes as an auxiliary lady-helper already on two occasions, though but little had been seen of her there—at the hospital of Our Lady of Dolours—as, on arriving, she had been overcome by such great fatigue that she had been forced, she said, to keep her room.

However, Madame de Jonquière, who managed the ward, treated her with good-natured tolerance. "Ah! my poor friends," said she, "there will be plenty of time for you to exert yourselves. Get to sleep if you can, and your turn will come when I can

no longer keep up." Then addressing her daughter, she resumed: "And you would do well, darling, not to excite yourself too much if you wish to keep your head clear."

Raymonde smiled and gave her mother a reproachful glance: "Mamma, mamma, why do you say that? Am I not sensible?" she asked.

Doubtless she was not boasting, for, despite her youthful, thoughtless air, the air of one who simply feels happy in living, there appeared in her grey eyes an expression of firm resolution, a resolution to shape her life for herself.

"It is true," the mother confessed with a little confusion, "this little girl is at times more sensible than I am myself. Come, pass me the cutlet—it is welcome, I assure you. Lord! how hungry I was!"

The meal continued, enlivened by the constant laughter of Madame Désagneaux and Raymonde. The latter was very animated, and her face, which was already growing somewhat yellow through long pining for a suitor, again assumed the rosy bloom of twenty. They had to eat very fast, for only ten minutes now remained to them. On all sides one heard the growing tumult of customers who feared that they would not have time to take their coffee.

All at once, however, Pierre made his appearance; a fit of stifling had again come over La Grivotte; and Madame de Jonquière hastily finished her artichoke and returned to her compartment, after kissing her daughter, who wished her "good-night" in a facetious way. The priest, however, had made a movement of surprise on perceiving Madame Vol-

mar with the red cross of the lady-hospitallers on her black bodice. He knew her, for he still called at long intervals on old Madame Volmar, the diamond-merchant's mother, who had beeen one of his own mother's friends. She was the most terrible woman in the world, religious beyond all reason, so harsh and stern, moreover, as to close the very window shutters in order to prevent her daughter-in-law from looking into the street. And he knew the young woman's story, how she had been imprisoned on the very morrow of her marriage, shut up between her mother-in-law, who tyrannised over her, and her husband, a repulsively ugly monster who went so far as to beat her, mad as he was with jealousy, although he himself kept mistresses. The unhappy woman was not allowed out of the house excepting it were to go to mass. And one day, at La Trinité, Pierre had surprised her secret, on seeing her behind the church exchanging a few hasty words with a well-groomed, distinguished-looking man.

The priest's sudden appearance in the refreshment-room had somewhat disconcerted Madame Volmar.

"What an unexpected meeting, Monsieur l'Abbé!" she said, offering him her long, warm hand. "What a long time it is since I last saw you!" And thereupon she explained that this was the third year she had gone to Lourdes, her mother-in-law having required her to join the Association of Our Lady of Salvation. "It is surprising that you did not see her at the station when we started," she added. "She sees me into the train and comes to meet me on my return."

This was said in an apparently simple way, but with such a subtle touch of irony that Pierre fancied he could guess the truth. He knew that she really had no religious principles at all, and that she merely followed the rites and ceremonies of the Church in order that she might now and again obtain an hour's freedom ; and all at once he intuitively realised that someone must be waiting for her yonder, that it was for the purpose of meeting him that she was thus hastening to Lourdes with her shrinking yet ardent air and flaming eyes, which she so prudently shrouded with a veil of lifeless indifference.

" For my part," he answered, " I am accompanying a friend of my childhood, a poor girl who is very ill indeed. I must ask your help for her ; you shall nurse her."

Thereupon she faintly blushed, and he no longer doubted the truth of his surmise. However, Raymonde was just then settling the bill with the easy assurance of a girl who is expert in figures ; and immediately afterwards Madame Désagneaux led Madame Volmar away. The waiters were now growing more distracted and the tables were fast being vacated ; for, on hearing a bell ring, everybody had begun to rush towards the door.

Pierre, on his side, was hastening back to his carriage, when he was stopped by an old priest. "Ah ! Monsieur le Curé," he said, " I saw you just before we started, but I was unable to get near enough to shake hands with you."

Thereupon he offered his hand to his brother ecclesiastic, who was looking and smiling at him in

a kindly way. The Abbé Judaine was the parish priest of Saligny, a little village in the department of the Oise. Tall and sturdy, he had a broad pink face, around which clustered a mass of white, curly hair, and it could be divined by his appearance that he was a worthy man whom neither the flesh nor the spirit had ever tormented. He believed indeed firmly and absolutely, with a tranquil godliness, never having known a struggle, endowed as he was with the ready faith of a child who is unacquainted with human passions. And ever since the Virgin at Lourdes had cured him of a disease of the eyes, by a famous miracle which folks still talked about, his belief had become yet more absolute and tender, as though impregnated with divine gratitude.

"I am pleased that you are with us, my friend," he gently said; "for there is much in these pilgrimages for young priests to profit by. I am told that some of them at times experience a feeling of rebellion. Well, you will see all these poor people praying,—it is a sight which will make you weep. How can one do otherwise than place oneself in God's hands, on seeing so much suffering cured or consoled?"

The old priest himself was accompanying a patient; and he pointed to a first-class compartment, at the door of which hung a placard bearing the inscription: "M. l'Abbé Judaine, Reserved." Then lowering his voice, he said: "It is Madame Dieulafay, you know, the great banker's wife. Their château, a royal domain, is in my parish, and when they learned that the Blessed Virgin had vouchsafed

me such an undeserved favour, they begged me to intercede for their poor sufferer. I have already said several masses, and most sincerely pray for her. There, you see her yonder on the ground. She insisted on being taken out of the carriage, in spite of all the trouble which one will have to place her in it again."

On a shady part of the platform, in a kind of long box, there was, as the old priest said, a woman whose beautiful, perfectly oval face, lighted up by splendid eyes, denoted no greater age than six-and-twenty. She was suffering from a frightful disease. The disappearance from her system of the calcareous salts had led to a softening of the osseous framework, the slow destruction of her bones. Three years previously, after the advent of a stillborn child, she had felt vague pains in the spinal column. And then, little by little, her bones had rarefied and lost shape, the vertebræ had sunk, the bones of the pelvis had flattened, and those of the arms and legs had contracted. Thus shrunken, melting away as it were, she had become a mere human remnant, a nameless, fluid thing, which could not be set erect, but had to be carried hither and thither with infinite care, for fear lest she should vanish between one's fingers. Her face, a motionless face, on which sat a stupefied imbecile expression, still retained its beauty of outline, and yet it was impossible to gaze at this wretched shred of a woman without feeling a heart-pang, the keener on account of all the luxury surrounding her; for not only was the box in which she lay lined with blue quilted silk, but she was covered

with valuable lace, and a cap of rare valenciennes was set upon her head, her wealth thus being proclaimed, displayed, in the midst of her awful agony.

"Ah! how pitiable it is," resumed the Abbé Judaine in an undertone. "To think that she is so young, so pretty, possessed of millions of money! And if you knew how dearly loved she was, with what adoration she is still surrounded. That tall gentleman near her is her husband, that elegantly dressed lady is her sister, Madame Jousseur."

Pierre remembered having often noticed in the newspapers the name of Madame Jousseur, wife of a diplomatist, and a conspicuous member of the higher spheres of Catholic society in Paris. People had even circulated a story of some great passion which she had fought against and vanquished. She also was very prettily dressed, with marvellously tasteful simplicity, and she ministered to the wants of her sorry sister with an air of perfect devotion. As for the unhappy woman's husband, who at the age of five-and-thirty had inherited his father's colossal business, he was a clear-complexioned, well-groomed, handsome man, clad in a closely buttoned frock-coat. His eyes, however, were full of tears, for he adored his wife, and had left his business in order to take her to Lourdes, placing his last hope in this appeal to the mercy of Heaven.

Ever since the morning, Pierre had beheld many frightful sufferings in that woeful white train. But none had so distressed his soul as did that wretched female skeleton, slowly liquefying in the midst of its

lace and its millions. "The unhappy woman!" he murmured with a shudder.

The Abbé Judaine, however, made a gesture of serene hope. "The Blessed Virgin will cure her," said he; "I have prayed to her so much."

Just then a bell again pealed, and this time it was really the signal for starting. Only two minutes remained. There was a last rush, and folks hurried back towards the train carrying eatables wrapped in paper, and bottles and cans which they had filled with water. Several of them quite lost their heads, and in their inability to find their carriages, ran distractedly from one to the other end of the train; whilst some of the infirm ones dragged themselves about amidst the precipitate tapping of crutches, and others, only able to walk with difficulty, strove to hasten their steps whilst leaning on the arms of some of the lady-hospitallers. It was only with infinite difficulty that four men managed to replace Madame Dieulafay in her first-class compartment. The Vignerons, who were content with second-class accommodation, had already reinstalled themselves in their quarters amidst an extraordinary heap of baskets, boxes, and valises which scarcely allowed little Gustave enough room to stretch his poor puny limbs—the limbs as it were of a deformed insect. And then all the women appeared again: Madame Maze gliding along in silence; Madame Vincent raising her dear little girl in her outstretched arms and dreading lest she should hear her cry out; Madame Vêtu, whom it had been necessary to push into the train, after rousing her from her stupefying torment; and

Elise Rouquet, who was quite drenched through her obstinacy in endeavouring to drink from the tap, and was still wiping her monstrous face. Whilst each returned to her place and the carriage filled once more, Marie listened to her father, who had come back delighted with his stroll to a pointsman's little house beyond the station, whence a really pleasant stretch of landscape could be discerned.

"Shall we lay you down again at once?" asked Pierre, sorely distressed by the pained expression on Marie's face.

"Oh no, no, by-and-by!" she replied. "I shall have plenty of time to hear those wheels roaring in my head as though they were grinding my bones."

Then, as Ferrand seemed on the point of returning to the cantine van, Sister Hyacinthe begged him to take another look at the strange man before he went off. She was still waiting for Father Massias, astonished at the inexplicable delay in his arrival, but not yet without hope, as Sister Claire des Anges had not returned.

"Pray, Monsieur Ferrand," said she, "tell me if this unfortunate man is in any immediate danger."

The young doctor again looked at the sufferer, felt him, and listened to his breathing. Then with a gesture of discouragement he answered in a low voice, "I feel convinced that you will not get him to Lourdes alive."

Every head was still anxiously stretched forward. If they had only known the man's name, the place he had come from, who he was! But it was impossible to extract a word from this unhappy stranger,

who was about to die there, in that carriage, without anybody being able to give his face a name!

It suddenly occurred to Sister Hyacinthe to have him searched. Under the circumstances there could certainly be no harm in such a course. "Feel in his pockets, Monsieur Ferrand," she said.

The doctor thereupon searched the man in a gentle, cautious way, but the only things that he found in his pockets were a chaplet, a knife, and three sous. And nothing more was ever learnt of the man.

At that moment, however, a voice announced that Sister Claire des Anges was at last coming back with Father Massias. All this while the latter had simply been chatting with the priest of Sainte-Radegonde in one of the waiting-rooms. Keen emotion attended his arrival; for a moment all seemed saved. But the train was about to start, the porters were already closing the carriage doors, and it was necessary that extreme unction should be administered in all haste in order to avoid too long a delay.

"This way, reverend Father!" exclaimed Sister Hyacinthe; "yes, yes, pray come in; our unfortunate patient is here."

Father Massias, who was five years older than Pierre, whose fellow-student however he had been at the seminary, had a tall, spare figure with an ascetic countenance, framed round with a light-coloured beard and vividly lighted up by burning eyes. He was neither the priest harassed by doubt, nor the priest with child-like faith, but an apostle carried away by his passion, ever ready to fight and vanquish for the pure glory of the Blessed Virgin. In

his black cloak with its large hood, and his broad-brimmed flossy hat, he shone resplendently with the perpetual ardour of battle.

He immediately took from his pocket the silver case containing the Holy Oils, and the ceremony began whilst the last carriage doors were being slammed and belated pilgrims were rushing back to the train ; the station-master, meantime, anxiously glancing at the clock, and realising that it would be necessary for him to grant a few minutes' grace.

"*Credo in unum Deum*," hastily murmured the Father.

"*Amen*," replied Sister Hyacinthe and the other occupants of the carriage.

Those who had been able to do so, had knelt upon the seats, whilst the others joined their hands, or repeatedly made the sign of the cross ; and when the murmured prayers were followed by the Litanies of the ritual, every voice rose, an ardent desire for the remission of the man's sins and for his physical and spiritual cure winging its flight heavenward with each successive *Kyrie eleison*. Might his whole life, of which they knew nought, be forgiven him ; might he enter, stranger though he was, in triumph into the Kingdom of God !

"*Christe, exaudi nos*."

"*Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix*."

Father Massias had pulled out the silver needle from which hung a drop of holy oil. In the midst of such a scramble, with the whole train waiting—many people now thrusting their heads out of the carriage windows in surprise at the delay in starting—he

could not think of following the usual practice, of anointing in turn all the organs of the senses, those portals of the soul which give admittance to evil.

He must content himself, as the rules authorised him to do in pressing cases, with one anointment; and this he made upon the man's lips, those livid parted lips from between which only a faint breath escaped, whilst the rest of his face, with its lowered eyelids, already seemed indistinct, again merged into the dust of the earth.

"*Per istam sanctam unctionem,*" said the Father, "*et suam piissimam misericordiam indulgeat tibi Dominus quidquid per visum, auditum, odoratum, gustum, tactum, deliquisti.*" [1]

The remainder of the ceremony was lost amid the hurry and scramble of the departure. Father Massias scarcely had time to wipe off the oil with the little piece of cotton-wool which Sister Hyacinthe held in readiness, before he had to leave the compartment and get into his own as fast as possible, setting the case containing the Holy Oils in order as he did so, whilst the pilgrims finished repeating the final prayer.

"We cannot wait any longer! It is impossible!" repeated the station-master as he bustled about. "Come, come, make haste everybody!"

At last then they were about to resume their journey. Everybody sat down, returned to his or her corner again. Madame de Jonquière, however, had

[1] Through this holy unction and His most tender mercy may the Lord pardon thee whatever sins thou hast committed by thy sight, hearing, etc.

changed her place, in order to be nearer La Grivotte, whose condition still worried her, and she was now seated in front of M. Sabathier, who remained waiting with silent resignation. Moreover, Sister Hyacinthe had not returned to her compartment, having decided to remain near the unknown man so that she might watch over him and help him. By following this course, too, she was able to minister to Brother Isidore, whose sufferings his sister Marthe was at a loss to assuage. And Marie, turning pale, felt the jolting of the train in her ailing flesh, even before it had resumed its journey under the heavy sun, rolling onward once more with its load of sufferers stifling in the pestilential atmosphere of the over-heated carriages.

At last a loud whistle resounded, the engine puffed, and Sister Hyacinthe rose up to say : "The *Magnificat*, my children !"

IV

MIRACLES

JUST as the train was beginning to move, the door of the compartment in which Pierre and Marie found themselves was opened and a porter pushed a girl of fourteen inside, saying: "There 's a seat here—make haste!"

The others were already pulling long faces and were about to protest, when Sister Hyacinthe exclaimed: "What, is it you, Sophie? So you are going back to see the Blessed Virgin who cured you last year!"

And at the same time Madame de Jonquière remarked: "Ah! Sophie, my little friend, I am very pleased to see that you are grateful."

"Why, yes, Sister; why, yes, madame," answered the girl, in a pretty way.

The carriage door had already been closed again, so that it was necessary that they should accept the presence of this new pilgrim who had fallen from heaven as it were at the very moment when the train, which she had almost missed, was starting off again. She was a slender damsel and would not take up much room. Moreover these ladies knew her, and

all the patients had turned their eyes upon her on hearing that the Blessed Virgin had been pleased to cure her. They had now got beyond the station, the engine was still puffing, whilst the wheels increased their speed, and Sister Hyacinthe, clapping her hands, repeated: "Come, come, my children, the *Magnificat*."

Whilst the joyful chant arose amidst the jolting of the train, Pierre gazed at Sophie. She was evidently a young peasant girl, the daughter of some poor husbandman of the vicinity of Poitiers, petted by her parents, treated in fact like a young lady since she had become the subject of a miracle, one of the elect, whom the priests of the district flocked to see. She wore a straw hat with pink ribbons, and a grey woollen dress trimmed with a flounce. Her round face although not pretty was a very pleasant one, with a beautifully fresh complexion and clear, intelligent eyes which lent her a smiling, modest air.

When the *Magnificat* had been sung, Pierre was unable to resist his desire to question Sophie. A child of her age, with so candid an air, so utterly unlike a liar, greatly interested him.

"And so you nearly missed the train, my child?" he said.

"I should have been much ashamed if I had, Monsieur l'Abbé," she replied. "I had been at the station since twelve o'clock. And all at once I saw his reverence, the priest of Sainte-Radegonde, who knows me well and who called me to him, to kiss me and tell me that it was very good of me to go back to Lourdes. But it seems the train was starting and

I only just had time to run on to the platform. Oh! I ran so fast!"

She paused, laughing, still slightly out of breath, but already repenting that she had been so giddy.

"And what is your name, my child?" asked Pierre.

"Sophie Couteau, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"You do not belong to the town of Poitiers?"

"Oh no! certainly not. We belong to Vivonne, which is seven kilomètres away. My father and mother have a little land there, and things would not be so bad if there were not eight children at home—I am the fifth,—fortunately the four older ones are beginning to work."

"And you, my child, what do you do?"

"I, Monsieur l'Abbé! Oh! I am no great help. Since last year, when I came home cured, I have not been left quiet a single day, for, as you can understand, so many people have come to see me, and then too I have been taken to Monseigneur's,[1] and to the convents and all manner of other places. And before all that I was a long time ill. I could not walk without a stick, and each step I took made me cry out, so dreadfully did my foot hurt me."

"So it was of some injury to the foot that the Blessed Virgin cured you?"

Sophie did not have time to reply, for Sister Hyacinthe, who was listening, intervened: "Of caries of the bones of the left heel, which had been going on for three years," said she. "The foot was swol-

[1] The Bishop's residence.

len and quite deformed, and there were fistulas giving egress to continual suppuration."

On hearing this, all the sufferers in the carriage became intensely interested. They no longer took their eyes off this little girl on whom a miracle had been performed, but scanned her from head to foot as though seeking for some sign of the prodigy. Those who were able to stand rose up in order that they might the better see her, and the others, the infirm ones, stretched on their mattresses, strove to raise themselves and turn their heads. Amidst the suffering which had again come upon them on leaving Poitiers, the terror which filled them at the thought that they must continue rolling onward for another fifteen hours, the sudden advent of this child, favoured by Heaven, was like a divine relief, a ray of hope whence they would derive sufficient strength to accomplish the remainder of their terrible journey. The moaning had abated somewhat already, and every face was turned towards the girl with an ardent desire to believe.

This was especially the case with Marie, who, already reviving, joined her trembling hands, and in a gentle supplicating voice said to Pierre: "Question her, pray question her, ask her to tell us everything—cured, O God! cured of such a terrible complaint!"

Madame de Jonquière, who was quite affected, had leant over the partition to kiss the girl. "Certainly," said she, "our little friend will tell you all about it. Won't you, my darling? You will tell us what the Blessed Virgin did for you?"

"Oh, certainly! madame—as much as you like," answered Sophie with her smiling, modest air, her eyes gleaming with intelligence. Indeed, she wished to begin at once, and raised her right hand with a pretty gesture, as a sign to everybody to be attentive. Plainly enough, she had already acquired the habit of speaking in public.

She could not be seen, however, from some parts of the carriage, and an idea came to Sister Hyacinthe, who said: "Get up on the seat, Sophie, and speak loudly, on account of the noise which the train makes."

This amused the girl, and before beginning she needed time to become serious again. "Well, it was like this," said she; "my foot was past cure, I could n't even go to church any more, and it had to be kept bandaged, because there was always a lot of nasty matter coming from it. Monsieur Rivoire, the doctor, who had made a cut in it, so as to see inside it, said that he should be obliged to take out a piece of the bone; and that, sure enough, would have made me lame for life. But when I got to Lourdes and had prayed a great deal to the Blessed Virgin, I went to dip my foot in the water, wishing so much that I might be cured that I did not even take the time to pull the bandage off. And everything remained in the water, there was no longer anything the matter with my foot when I took it out."

A murmur of mingled surprise, wonder, and desire arose and spread among those who heard this marvellous tale, so sweet and soothing to all who were in despair. But the little one had not yet finished.

She had simply paused. And now, making a fresh gesture, holding her arms somewhat apart, she concluded: "When I got back to Vivonne and Monsieur Rivoire saw my foot again, he said: 'Whether it be God or the Devil who has cured this child, it is all the same to me; but in all truth she *is* cured.'"

This time a burst of laughter rang out. The girl spoke in too recitative a way, having repeated her story so many times already that she knew it by heart. The doctor's remark was sure to produce an effect, and she herself laughed at it in advance, certain as she was that the others would laugh also. However, she still retained her candid, touching air.

But she had evidently forgotten some particular, for Sister Hyacinthe, a glance from whom had foreshadowed the doctor's jest, now softly prompted her: "And what was it you said to Madame la Comtesse, the superintendent of your ward, Sophie?"

"Ah! yes. I had n't brought many bandages for my foot with me, and I said to her, 'It was very kind of the Blessed Virgin to cure me the first day, as I should have run out of linen on the morrow.'"

This provoked a fresh outburst of delight. They all thought her so nice, to have been cured like that! And in reply to a question from Madame de Jonquière, she also had to tell the story of her boots, a pair of beautiful new boots which Madame la Comtesse had given her, and in which she had run, jumped, and danced about, full of childish delight. Boots! think of it, she who for three years had not even been able to wear a slipper.

Pierre, who had become grave, waxing pale with

the secret uneasiness which was penetrating him, continued to look at her. And he also asked her other questions. She was certainly not lying, and he merely suspected a slow distortion of the actual truth, an easily explained embellishment of the real facts amidst all the joy she felt at being cured and becoming an important little personage. Who now knew if the cicatrisation of her injuries, effected, so it was asserted, completely, instantaneously, in a few seconds, had not in reality been the work of days? Where were the witnesses?

Just then Madame de Jonquière began to relate that she had been at the hospital at the time referred to. "Sophie was not in my ward," said she, "but I had met her walking lame that very morning——"

Pierre hastily interrupted the lady-hospitaller. "Ah! you saw her foot before and after the immersion?"

"No, no! I don't think that anybody was able to see it, for it was bound round with bandages. She told you that the bandages had fallen into the piscina." And, turning towards the child, Madame de Jonquière added, "But she will show you her foot—won't you, Sophie? Undo your shoe."

The girl took off her shoe, and pulled down her stocking, with a promptness and ease of manner which showed how thoroughly accustomed she had become to it all. And she not only stretched out her foot, which was very clean and very white, carefully tended indeed, with well-cut, pink nails, but complacently turned it so that the young priest might examine it at his ease. Just below the ankle there

was a long scar, whose whity seam, plainly defined, testified to the gravity of the complaint from which the girl had suffered.

"Oh! take hold of the heel, Monsieur l'Abbé," said she. "Press it as hard as you like. I no longer feel any pain at all."

Pierre made a gesture from which it might have been thought that he was delighted with the power exercised by the Blessed Virgin. But he was still tortured by doubt. What unknown force had acted in this case? Or rather what faulty medical diagnosis, what assemblage of errors and exaggerations, had ended in this fine tale?

All the patients, however, wished to see the miraculous foot, that outward and visible sign of the divine cure which each of them was going in search of. And it was Marie, sitting up in her box, and already feeling less pain, who touched it first. Then Madame Maze, quite roused from her melancholy, passed it on to Madame Vincent, who would have kissed it for the hope which it restored to her. M. Sabathier had listened to all the explanations with a beatific air; Madame Vêtu, La Grivotte, and even Brother Isidore opened their eyes, and evinced signs of interest; whilst the face of Elise Rouquet had assumed an extraordinary expression, transfigured by faith, almost beatified. If a sore had thus disappeared, might not her own sore close and disappear, her face retaining no trace of it save a slight scar, and again becoming such a face as other people had? Sophie, who was still standing, had to hold on to one of the iron rails, and place her foot on the partition,

now on the right, now on the left. And she did not weary of it all, but felt exceedingly happy and proud at the many exclamations which were raised, the quivering admiration and religious respect which were bestowed on that little piece of her person, that little foot which had now, so to say, become sacred.

"One must possess great faith, no doubt," said Marie, thinking aloud. "One must have a pure unspotted soul." And, addressing herself to M. de Guersaint, she added: "Father, I feel that I should get well if I were ten years old, if I had the unspotted soul of a little girl."

"But you are ten years old, my darling! Is it not so, Pierre? A little girl of ten years old could not have a more spotless soul."

Possessed of a mind prone to chimeras, M. de Guersaint was fond of hearing tales of miracles. As for the young priest, profoundly affected by the ardent purity which the young girl evinced, he no longer sought to discuss the question, but let her surrender herself to the consoling illusions which Sophie's tale had wafted through the carriage.

The temperature had become yet more oppressive since their departure from Poitiers, a storm was rising in the coppery sky, and it seemed as though the train were rushing through a furnace. The villages passed, mournful and solitary under the burning sun. At Couhé-Verac they had again said their chaplets, and sung another canticle. At present, however, there was some slight abatement of the religious exercises. Sister Hyacinthe, who had not yet been able to lunch, ventured to eat a roll and

some fruit in all haste, whilst still ministering to the strange man whose faint, painful breathing seemed to have become more regular. And it was only on passing Ruffec at three o'clock that they said the vespers of the Blessed Virgin.

"*Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix.*"

"*Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.*" [1]

As they were finishing, M. Sabathier, who had watched little Sophie while she put on her shoe and stocking, turned towards M. de Guersaint.

"This child's case is interesting, no doubt," he remarked. "But it is a mere nothing, monsieur, for there have been far more marvellous cures than that. Do you know the story of Pierre de Rudder, a Belgian working-man?"

Everybody had again begun to listen.

"This man," continued M. Sabathier, "had his leg broken by the fall of a tree. Eight years afterwards the two fragments of the bone had not yet joined together again—the two ends could be seen in the depths of a sore which was continually suppurating; and the leg hung down quite limp, swaying in all directions. Well, it was sufficient for this man to drink a glassful of the miraculous water, and his leg was made whole again. He was able to walk without crutches, and the doctor said to him: 'Your leg is like that of a new-born child.' Yes, indeed, a perfectly new leg."

Nobody spoke, but the listeners exchanged glances of ecstasy.

[1] "Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ."

"And, by the way," resumed M. Sabathier, "it is like the story of Louis Bouriette, a quarryman, one of the first of the Lourdes miracles. Do you know it? Bouriette had been injured by an explosion during some blasting operations. The sight of his right eye was altogether destroyed, and he was even threatened with the loss of the left one. Well, one day he sent his daughter to fetch a bottleful of the muddy water of the source, which then scarcely bubbled up to the surface. He washed his eye with this muddy liquid, and prayed fervently. And, all at once, he raised a cry, for he could see, monsieur, see as well as you and I. The doctor who was attending him drew up a detailed narrative of the case, and there cannot be the slightest doubt about its truth."

"It is marvellous," murmured M. de Guersaint in his delight.

"Would you like another example, monsieur? I can give you a famous one, that of François Macary, the carpenter of Lavaur. During eighteen years he had suffered from a deep varicose ulcer, with considerable enlargement of the tissues in the mesial part of the left leg. He had reached such a point that he could no longer move, and science decreed that he would forever remain infirm. Well, one evening he shuts himself up with a bottle of Lourdes water. He takes off his bandages, washes both his legs, and drinks what little water then remains in the bottle. Then he goes to bed and falls asleep; and when he awakes, he feels his legs and looks at them. There is nothing left; the varicose

enlargement, the ulcers, have all disappeared. The skin of his knee, monsieur, had become as smooth, as fresh as it had been when he was twenty."

This time there was an explosion of surprise and admiration. The patients and the pilgrims were entering into the enchanted land of miracles, where impossibilities are accomplished at each bend of the pathways, where one marches on at ease from prodigy to prodigy. And each had his or her story to tell, burning with a desire to contribute a fresh proof, to fortify faith and hope by yet another example.

That silent creature, Madame Maze, was so transported that she spoke the first. "I have a friend," said she, "who knew the Widow Rizan, that lady whose cure also created so great a stir. For four-and-twenty years her left side had been entirely paralysed. Her stomach was unable to retain any solid food, and she had become an inert bag of bones which had to be turned over in bed. The friction of the sheets, too, had ended by rubbing her skin away in parts. Well, she was so low one evening that the doctor announced that she would die during the night. An hour later, however, she emerged from her torpor and asked her daughter in a faint voice to go and fetch her a glass of Lourdes water from a neighbour's. But she was only able to obtain this glass of water on the following morning; and she cried out to her daughter: 'Oh! it is life that I am drinking—rub my face with it, rub my arm and my leg, rub my whole body with it!' And when her daughter obeyed her, she gradually saw the huge swelling subside, and the paralysed, tumefied limbs

recover their natural suppleness and appearance. Nor was that all, for Madame Rizan cried out that she was cured and felt hungry, and wanted bread and meat—she who had eaten none for four-and-twenty years! And she got out of bed and dressed herself, whilst her daughter, who was so overpowered that the neighbours thought she had become an orphan, replied to them: 'No, no, mamma is n't dead, she has come to life again!'"

This narrative had brought tears to Madame Vincent's eyes. Ah! if she had only been able to see her little Rose recover like that, eat with a good appetite, and run about again! At the same time, another case, which she had been told of in Paris and which had greatly influenced her in deciding to take her ailing child to Lourdes, returned to her memory.

"And I, too," said she, "know the story of a girl who was paralysed. Her name was Lucie Druon, and she was an inmate of an orphan asylum. She was quite young and could not even kneel down. Her limbs were bent like hoops. Her right leg, the shorter of the two, had ended by becoming twisted round the left one; and when any of the other girls carried her about you saw her feet hanging down quite limp, like dead ones. Please notice that she did not even go to Lourdes. She simply performed a novena; but she fasted during the nine days, and her desire to be cured was so great that she spent her nights in prayer. At last, on the ninth day, whilst she was drinking a little Lourdes water, she felt a violent commotion in her legs. She picked herself

up, fell down, picked herself up again and *walked.* All her little companions, who were astonished, almost frightened at the sight, began to cry out: 'Lucie can walk! Lucie can walk!' It was quite true. In a few seconds her legs had become straight and strong and healthy. She crossed the courtyard and was able to climb up the steps of the chapel, where the whole sisterhood, transported with gratitude, chanted the *Magnfiicat.* Ah! the dear child, how happy, how happy she must have been!"

As Madame Vincent finished, two tears fell from her cheeks on to the pale face of her little girl, whom she kissed distractedly.

The general interest was still increasing, becoming quite impassioned. The rapturous joy born of these beautiful stories, in which Heaven invariably triumphed over human reality, transported these child-like souls to such a point that those who were suffering the most grievously sat up in their turn, and recovered the power of speech. And with the narratives of one and all was blended a thought of the sufferer's own ailment, a belief that he or she would also be cured, since a malady of the same description had vanished like an evil dream beneath the breath of the Divinity.

"Ah!" stammered Madame Vêtu, her articulation hindered by her sufferings, "there was another one, Antoinette Thardivail, whose stomach was being eaten away like mine. You would have said that dogs were devouring it, and sometimes there was a swelling in it as big as a child's head. Tumours indeed were ever forming in it, like fowl's

eggs, so that for eight months she brought up blood. And she also was at the point of death, with nothing but her skin left on her bones, and dying of hunger, when she drank some water of Lourdes and had the pit of her stomach washed with it. Three minutes afterwards, her doctor, who on the previous day had left her almost in the last throes, scarce breathing, found her up and sitting by the fireside, eating a tender chicken's wing with a good appetite. She had no more tumours, she laughed as she had laughed when she was twenty, and her face had regained the brilliancy of youth. Ah! to be able to eat what one likes, to become young again, to cease suffering!"

"And the cure of Sister Julienne!" then exclaimed La Grivotte, raising herself on one of her elbows, her eyes glittering with fever. "In her case it commenced with a bad cold as it did with me, and then she began to spit blood. And every six months she fell ill again and had to take to her bed. The last time everybody said that she would n't leave it alive. The doctors had vainly tried every remedy, iodine, blistering, and cauterising. In fact, hers was a real case of phthisis, certified by half a dozen medical men. Well, she comes to Lourdes, and Heaven alone knows amidst what awful suffering—she was so bad, indeed, that at Toulouse they thought for a moment that she was about to die! The Sisters had to carry her in their arms, and on reaching the piscina the lady-hospitallers would n't bathe her. She was dead, they said. No matter! she was undressed at last, and plunged into the

water, quite unconscious and covered with perspiration. And when they took her out she was so pale that they laid her on the ground, thinking that it was certainly all over with her at last. But, all at once, colour came back to her cheeks, her eyes opened, and she drew a long breath. She was cured; she dressed herself without any help and made a good meal after she had been to the Grotto to thank the Blessed Virgin. There! there 's no gainsaying it, that was a real case of phthisis, completely cured as though by medicine!"

Thereupon Brother Isidore in his turn wished to speak; but he was unable to do so at any length, and could only with difficulty manage to say to his sister: "Marthe, tell them the story of Sister Dorothée which the priest of Saint-Sauveur related to us."

"Sister Dorothée," began the peasant girl in an awkward way, "felt her leg quite numbed when she got up one morning, and from that time she lost the use of it, for it got as cold and as heavy as a stone. Besides which she felt a great pain in the back. The doctors could n't understand it. She saw half a dozen of them, who pricked her with pins and burnt her skin with a lot of drugs. But it was just as if they had sung to her. Sister Dorothée had well understood that only the Blessed Virgin could find the right remedy for her, and so she went off to Lourdes, and had herself dipped in the piscina. She thought at first that the water was going to kill her, for it was so bitterly cold. But by-and-by it became so soft that she fancied it was warm, as nice as milk,

She had never felt so nice before, it seemed to her as if her veins were opening and the water were flowing into them. As you will understand, life was returning into her body since the Blessed Virgin was concerning herself in the case. She no longer had anything the matter with her when she came out, but walked about, ate the whole of a pigeon for her dinner, and slept all night long like the happy woman she was. Glory to the Blessed Virgin, eternal gratitude to the most Powerful Mother and her Divine Son!"

Elise Rouquet would also have liked to bring forward a miracle which she was acquainted with. Only she spoke with so much difficulty owing to the deformity of her mouth, that she had not yet been able to secure a turn. Just then, however, there was a pause, and drawing the wrap, which concealed the horror of her sore, slightly on one side, she profited by the opportunity to begin.

"For my part, I was n't told anything about a great illness, but it was a very funny case at all events," she said. "It was about a woman, Célestine Dubois, as she was called, who had run a needle right into her hand while she was washing. It stopped there for seven years, for no doctor was able to take it out. Her hand shrivelled up, and she could no longer open it. Well, she got to Lourdes, and dipped her hand into the piscina. But as soon as she did so she began to shriek, and took it out again. Then they caught hold of her and put her hand into the water by force, and kept it there while she continued sobbing, with her face covered with

sweat. Three times did they plunge her hand into the piscina, and each time they saw the needle moving along, till it came out by the tip of the thumb. She shrieked, of course, because the needle was moving though her flesh just as though somebody had been pushing it to drive it out. And after that Célestine never suffered again, and only a little scar could be seen on her hand as a mark of what the Blessed Virgin had done."

This anecdote produced a greater effect than even the miraculous cures of the most fearful illnesses. A needle which moved as though somebody were pushing it! This peopled the Invisible, showed each sufferer his Guardian Angel standing behind him, only awaiting the orders of Heaven in order to render him assistance. And besides, how pretty and childlike the story was—this needle which came out in the miraculous water after obstinately refusing to stir during seven long years. Exclamations of delight resounded from all the pleased listeners; they smiled and laughed with satisfaction, radiant at finding that nothing was beyond the power of Heaven, and that if it were Heaven's pleasure they themselves would all become healthy, young, and superb. It was sufficient that one should fervently believe and pray in order that nature might be confounded and that the Incredible might come to pass. Apart from that there was merely a question of good luck, since Heaven seemed to make a selection of those sufferers who should be cured.

"Oh! how beautiful it is, father," murmured Marie, who, revived by the passionate interest which

she took in the momentous subject, had so far contented herself with listening, dumb with amazement as it were. "Do you remember," she continued, "what you yourself told me of that poor woman, Joachine Dehaut, who came from Belgium and made her way right across France with her twisted leg eaten away by an ulcer, the awful smell of which drove everybody away from her? First of all the ulcer was healed; you could press her knee and she felt nothing, only a slight redness remained to mark where it had been. And then came the turn of the dislocation. She shrieked while she was in the water, it seemed to her as if somebody were breaking her bones, pulling her leg away from her; and, at the same time, she and the woman who was bathing her, saw her deformed foot rise and extend into its natural shape with the regular movement of a clock hand. Her leg also straightened itself, the muscles extended, the knee replaced itself in its proper position, all amidst such acute pain that Joachine ended by fainting. But as soon as she recovered consciousness, she darted off, erect and agile, to carry her crutches to the Grotto."

M. de Guersaint in his turn was laughing with wonderment, waving his hand to confirm this story, which had been told him by a Father of the Assumption. He could have related a score of similar instances, said he, each more touching, more extraordinary than the other. He even invoked Pierre's testimony, and the young priest, who was unable to believe, contented himself with nodding his head. At first, unwilling as he was to afflict Marie, he had

striven to divert his thoughts by gazing though the carriage window at the fields, trees, and houses which defiled before his eyes. They had just passed Angoulême, and meadows stretched out, and lines of poplar trees fled away amidst the continuous fanning of the air, which the velocity of the train occasioned.

They were late, no doubt, for they were hastening onward at full speed, thundering along under the stormy sky, through the fiery atmosphere, devouring kilomètre after kilomètre in swift succession. However, despite himself, Pierre heard snatches of the various narratives, and grew interested in these extravagant stories, which the rough jolting of the wheels accompanied like a lullaby, as though the engine had been turned loose and were wildly bearing them away to the divine land of dreams. They were rolling, still rolling along, and Pierre at last ceased to gaze at the landscape, and surrendered himself to the heavy, sleep-inviting atmosphere of the carriage, where ecstasy was growing and spreading, carrying everyone far from the world of reality across which they were so rapidly rushing. The sight of Marie's face with its brightened look filled the young priest with sincere joy, and he let her retain his hand, which she had taken in order to acquaint him, by the pressure of her fingers, with all the confidence which was reviving in her soul. And why should he have saddened her by his doubts, since he was so desirous of her cure? So he continued clasping her small, moist hand, feeling infinite affection for her, a dolorous brotherly love which distracted him, and made

him anxious to believe in the pity of the spheres, in a superior kindness which tempered suffering to those who were plunged in despair. "Oh!" she repeated, "how beautiful it is, Pierre! How beautiful it is! And what glory it will be if the Blessed Virgin deigns to disturb herself for me! Do you really think me worthy of such a favour?"

"Assuredly I do," he exclaimed; "you are the best and the purest, with a spotless soul as your father said; there are not enough good angels in Paradise to form your escort."

But the narratives were not yet finished. Sister Hyacinthe and Madame de Jonquière were now enumerating all the miracles with which they were acquainted, the long, long series of miracles which for more than thirty years had been flowering at Lourdes, like the uninterrupted budding of the roses on the Mystical Rose-tree. They could be counted by thousands, they put forth fresh shoots every year with prodigious verdancy of sap, becoming brighter and brighter each successive season. And the sufferers who listened to these marvellous stories with increasing feverishness were like little children who, after hearing one fine fairy tale, ask for another, and another, and yet another. Oh! that they might have more and more of those stories in which evil reality was flouted, in which unjust nature was cuffed and slapped, in which the Divinity intervened as the supreme healer, He who laughs at science and distributes happiness according to His own good pleasure.

First of all there were the deaf and the dumb who

suddenly heard and spoke ; such as Aurélie Bruneau, who was incurably deaf, with the drums of both ears broken, and yet was suddenly enraptured by the celestial music of a harmonium ; such also as Louise Pourchet, who on her side had been dumb for five-and-twenty years, and yet, whilst praying in the Grotto, suddenly exclaimed, "Hail, Mary, full of grace!" And there were others and yet others who were completely cured by merely letting a few drops of water fall into their ears or upon their tongues. Then came the procession of the blind : Father Hermann, who felt the Blessed Virgin's gentle hand removing the veil which covered his eyes ; Mademoiselle de Pontbriant, who was threatened with a total loss of sight, but after a simple prayer was enabled to see better than she had ever seen before ; then a child twelve years old whose corneas resembled marbles, but who, in three seconds, became possessed of clear, deep eyes, bright with an angelic smile. However, there was especially an abundance of paralytics, of lame people suddenly enabled to walk upright, of sufferers for long years powerless to stir from their beds of misery and to whom the voice said : "Arise and walk!" Delannoy,[1] afflicted with ataxia, vainly cauterised and burnt, fifteen

[1] This was one of the most notorious of the recorded cases and had a very strange sequel subsequent to the first publication of this work. Pierre Delannoy had been employed as a ward-assistant in one of the large Paris hospitals from 1877 to 1881, when he came to the conclusion that the life of an in-patient was far preferable to the one he was leading. He, therefore, resolved to pass the rest of his days inside different hospitals in the capacity of invalid. He

times an inmate of the Paris hospitals, whence he had emerged with the concurring diagnosis of twelve doctors, feels a strange force raising him up as the Blessed Sacrament goes by, and he begins to follow it, his legs strong and healthy once more. Marie Louise Delpon, a girl of fourteen, suffering from paralysis which had stiffened her legs, drawn back

started by feigning locomotor ataxia, and for six years deceived the highest medical experts in Paris, so curiously did he appear to suffer. He stayed in turn in all the hospitals in the city, being treated with every care and consideration, until at last he met with a doctor who insisted on cauterisation and other disagreeable remedies. Delannoy thereupon opined that the time to be cured had arrived, and cured he became, and was discharged. He next appeared at Lourdes, supported by crutches, and presenting every symptom of being hopelessly crippled. With other infirm and decrepid people he was dipped in the piscina and so efficacious did this treatment prove that he came out another man, threw his crutches to the ground and walked, as an onlooker expressed it, "like a rural postman." All Lourdes rang with the fame of the miracle, and the Church, after starring Delannoy round the country as a specimen of what could be done at the holy spring, placed him in charge of a home for invalids. But this was too much like hard work, and he soon decamped with all the money he could lay his hands on. Returning to Paris he was admitted to the Hospital of Ste. Anne as suffering from mental debility, but this did not prevent him from running off one night with about $300 belonging to a dispenser. The police were put on his track and arrested him in May, 1895, when he tried to pass himself off as a lunatic; but he had become by this time too well known, and was indicted in due course. At his trial he energetically denied that he had ever shammed, but the Court would not believe him, and sentenced him to four years' imprisonment with hard labour.—*Trans.*

her hands, and twisted her mouth on one side, sees her limbs loosen and the distortion of her mouth disappear as though an invisible hand were severing the fearful bonds which had deformed her. Marie Vachier, riveted to her arm-chair during seventeen years by paraplegia, not only runs and flies on emerging from the piscina, but finds no trace even of the sores with which her long-enforced immobility had covered her body. And Georges Hanquet, attacked by softening of the spinal marrow, passes without transition from agony to perfect health; while Léonie Charton, likewise afflicted with softening of the medulla, and whose vertebræ bulge out to a considerable extent, feels her hump melting away as though by enchantment, and her legs rise and straighten, renovated and vigorous.

Then came all sorts of ailments. First those brought about by scrofula—a great many more legs long incapable of service and made anew. There was Margaret Gehier, who had suffered from coxalgia for seven-and-twenty years, whose hip was devoured by the disease, whose left knee was anchylosed, and who yet was suddenly able to fall upon her knees to thank the Blessed Virgin for healing her. There was also Philomène Simonneau, the young Vendéenne, whose left leg was perforated by three horrible sores in the depths of which her carious bones were visible, and whose bones, whose flesh, and whose skin were all formed afresh.

Next came the dropsical ones: Madame Ancelin, the swelling of whose feet, hands, and entire body subsided without anyone being able to tell whither

all the water had gone; Mademoiselle Montagnon, from whom, on various occasions, nearly twenty quarts of water had been drawn, and who, on again swelling, was entirely rid of the fluid by the application of a bandage which had been dipped in the miraculous source. And, in her case also, none of the water could be found, either in her bed or on the floor. In the same way, not a complaint of the stomach resisted, all disappeared with the first glass of water. There was Marie Souchet, who vomited black blood, who had wasted to a skeleton, and who devoured her food and recovered her flesh in two days' time! There was Marie Jarland, who had burnt herself internally through drinking a glass of a metallic solution used for cleansing and brightening kitchen utensils, and who felt the tumour which had resulted from her injuries melt rapidly away. Moreover, every tumour disappeared in this fashion, in the piscina, without leaving the slightest trace behind. But that which caused yet greater wonderment was the manner in which ulcers, cancers, all sorts of horrible, visible sores were cicatrised as by a breath from on high. A Jew, an actor, whose hand was devoured by an ulcer, merely had to dip it in the water and he was cured. A very wealthy young foreigner, who had a wen as large as a hen's egg on his right wrist, *beheld* it dissolve. Rose Duval, who, as a result of a white tumour, had a hole in her left elbow, large enough to accommodate a walnut, was able to watch and follow the prompt action of the new flesh in filling up this cavity! The Widow Fromond, with a lip half destroyed by a cancerous

formation, merely had to apply the miraculous water to it as a lotion, and not even a red mark remained. Marie Moreau, who experienced fearful sufferings from a cancer in the breast, fell asleep, after laying on it a linen cloth soaked in some water of Lourdes, and when she awoke, two hours later, the pain had disappeared, and her flesh was once more smooth and pink and fresh.

At last Sister Hyacinthe began to speak of the immediate and complete cures of phthisis, and this was the triumph, the healing of that terrible disease which ravages humanity, which unbelievers defied the Blessed Virgin to cure, but which she did cure, it was said, by merely raising her little finger. A hundred instances, more extraordinary one than the other, pressed forward for citation.

Marguerite Coupel, who had suffered from phthisis for three years, and the upper part of whose lungs is destroyed by tuberculosis, rises up and goes off, radiant with health. Madame de la Rivière, who spits blood, who is ever covered with a cold perspiration, whose nails have already acquired a violet tinge, who is indeed on the point of drawing her last breath, requires but a spoonful of the water to be administered to her between her teeth, and lo! the rattles cease, she sits up, makes the responses to the litanies, and asks for some broth. Julie Jadot requires four spoonfuls; but then she could no longer hold up her head, she was of such a delicate constitution that disease had reduced her to nothing; and yet, in a few days, she becomes quite fat. Anna Catry, who is in the most advanced stage of the

malady, with her left lung half destroyed by a cavity, is plunged five times into the cold water, contrary to all the dictates of prudence, and she is cured, her lung is healthy once more. Another consumptive girl, condemned by fifteen doctors, has asked nothing, has simply fallen on her knees in the Grotto, by chance as it were, and is afterwards quite surprised at having been cured *au passage*, through the lucky circumstance of having been there, no doubt, at the hour when the Blessed Virgin, moved to pity, allows miracles to fall from her invisible hands.

Miracles and yet more miracles! They rained down like the flowers of dreams from a clear and balmy sky. Some of them were touching, some of them were childish. An old woman, who, having her hand anchylosed, had been incapable of moving it for thirty years, washes it in the water and is at once able to make the sign of the Cross. Sister Sophie, who barked like a dog, plunges into the piscina and emerges from it with a clear, pure voice, chanting a canticle. Mustapha, a Turk, invokes the White Lady and recovers the use of his right eye by applying a compress to it. An officer of Turcos was protected at Sedan; a cuirassier of Reichsoffen would have died, pierced in the heart by a bullet, if this bullet after passing though his pocket-book had not stayed its flight on reaching a little picture of Our Lady of Lourdes! And, as with the men and women, so did the children, the poor, suffering little ones, find mercy; a paralytic boy of five rose and walked after being held for five minutes under the icy jet of the spring; another one,

fifteen years of age, who, lying in bed, could only raise an inarticulate cry, sprang out of the piscina, shouting that he was cured; another one, but two years old, a poor tiny fellow who had never been able to walk, remained for a quarter of an hour in the cold water and then, invigorated and smiling, took his first steps like a little man! And for all of them, the little ones as well as the adults, the pain was acute whilst the miracle was being accomplished; for the work of repair could not be effected without causing an extraordinary shock to the whole human organism; the bones grew again, new flesh was formed, and the disease, driven away, made its escape in a final convulsion. But how great was the feeling of comfort which followed! The doctors could not believe their eyes, their astonishment burst forth at each fresh cure, when they saw the patients whom they had despaired of run and jump and eat with ravenous appetites. All these chosen ones, these women cured of their ailments, walked a couple of miles, sat down to roast fowl, and slept the soundest of sleeps for a dozen hours. Moreover, there was no convalescence, it was a sudden leap from the death throes to complete health. Limbs were renovated, sores were filled up, organs were reformed in their entirety, plumpness returned to the emaciated, all with the velocity of a lightning flash! Science was completely baffled. Not even the most simple precautions were taken, women were bathed at all times and seasons, perspiring consumptives were plunged into the icy water, sores were left to their putrefaction without any thought of employing anti-

septics. And then what canticles of joy, what shouts of gratitude and love arose at each fresh miracle! The favoured one falls upon her knees, all who are present weep, conversions are effected, Protestants and Jews alike embrace Catholicism—other miracles these, miracles of faith, at which Heaven triumphs. And when the favoured one, chosen for the miracle, returns to her village, all the inhabitants crowd to meet her, whilst the bells peal merrily; and when she is seen springing lightly from the vehicle which has brought her home, shouts and sobs of joy burst forth and all intonate the *Magnificat:* Glory to the Blessed Virgin! Gratitude and love for ever!

Indeed, that which was more particularly evolved from the realisation of all these hopes, from the celebration of all these ardent thanksgivings, was gratitude—gratitude to the Mother most pure and most admirable. She was the great passion of every soul, she, the Virgin most powerful, the Virgin most merciful, the Mirror of Justice, the Seat of Wisdom.[1] All hands were stretched towards her, Mystical Rose in the dim light of the chapels, Tower of Ivory on the horizon of dreamland, Gate of Heaven leading into the Infinite. Each day at early dawn she shone forth, bright Morning Star, gay with juvenescent hope. And was she not also the Health of the weak, the Refuge of sinners, the Comforter of the afflicted? France had ever been her well-loved country, she

[1] For the information of Protestant and other non-Catholic readers it may be mentioned that all the titles enumerated in this passage are taken from the Litany of the Blessed Virgin.—*Trans.*

was adored there with an ardent worship, the worship of her womanhood and her motherhood, the soaring of a divine affection ; and it was particularly in France that it pleased her to show herself to little shepherdesses. She was so good to the little and the humble ; she continually occupied herself with them ; and if she was appealed to so willingly it was because she was known to be the intermediary of love betwixt Earth and Heaven. Every evening she wept tears of gold at the feet of her divine Son to obtain favours from Him, and these favours were the miracles which He permitted her to work,—these beautiful, flower-like miracles, as sweet-scented as the roses of Paradise, so prodigiously splendid and fragrant.

But the train was still rolling, rolling onward. They had just passed Coutras, it was six o'clock, and Sister Hyacinthe, rising to her feet, clapped her hands together and once again repeated : "The Angelus, my children !"

Never had "Aves" impregnated with greater faith, inflamed with a more fervent desire to be heard by Heaven, winged their flight on high. And Pierre suddenly understood everything, clearly realised the meaning of all these pilgrimages, of all these trains rolling along through every country of the civilised world, of all these eager crowds, hastening towards Lourdes, which blazed over yonder like the abode of salvation for body and for mind. Ah ! the poor wretches whom, ever since morning, he had heard groaning with pain, the poor wretches who exposed their sorry carcasses to the fatigues of such a journey ! They were all condemned, abandoned

by science, weary of consulting doctors, of having tried the torturing effects of futile remedies. And how well one could understand that, burning with a desire to preserve their lives, unable to resign themselves to the injustice and indifference of Nature, they should dream of a superhuman power, of an almighty Divinity who, in their favour, would perchance annul the established laws, alter the course of the planets, and reconsider His creation! For if the world failed them, did not the Divinity remain to them? In their cases reality was too abominable, and an immense need of illusion and falsehood sprang up within them. Oh! to believe that there is a supreme Justiciar somewhere, one who rights the apparent wrongs of things and beings; to believe that there is a Redeemer, a consoler who is the real master, who can carry the torrents back to their source, who can restore youth to the aged, and life to the dead! And when you are covered with sores, when your limbs are twisted, when your stomach is swollen by tumours, when your lungs are destroyed by disease, to be able to say that all this is of no consequence, that everything may disappear and be renewed at a sign from the Blessed Virgin, that it is sufficient that you shold pray to her, touch her heart, and obtain the favour of being chosen by her. And then what a heavenly fount of hope appeared with the prodigious flow of those beautiful stories of cure, those adorable fairy tales which lulled and intoxicated the feverish imaginations of the sick and the infirm. Since little Sophie Couteau, with her white, sound foot, had climbed into that carriage, opening

to the gaze of those within it the limitless heavens of the Divine and the Supernatural, how well one could understand the breath of resurrection that was passing over the world, slowly raising those who despaired the most from their beds of misery, and making their eyes shine since life was itself a possibility for them, and they were, perhaps, about to begin it afresh.

Yes, 't was indeed that. If that woeful train was rolling, rolling on, if that carriage was full, if the other carriages were full also, if France and the world, from the uttermost limits of the earth, were crossed by similar trains, if crowds of three hundred thousand believers, bringing thousands of sick along with them, were ever setting out, from one end of the year to the other, it was because the Grotto yonder was shining forth in its glory like a beacon of hope and illusion, like a sign of the revolt and triumph of the Impossible over inexorable materiality. Never had a more impassionating romance been devised to exalt the souls of men above the stern laws of life. To dream that dream, this was the great, the ineffable happiness. If the Fathers of the Assumption had seen the success of their pilgrimages increase and spread from year to year, it was because they sold to all the flocking peoples the bread of consolation and illusion, the delicious bread of hope, for which suffering humanity ever hungers with a hunger that nothing will ever appease. And it was not merely the physical sores which cried aloud for cure, the whole of man's moral and intellectual being likewise shrieked forth its wretchedness, with an insati-

able yearning for happiness. To be happy, to place the certainty of life in faith, to lean till death should come upon that one strong staff of travel—such was the desire exhaled by every breast, the desire which made every moral grief bend the knee, imploring a continuance of grace, the conversion of dear ones, the spiritual salvation of self and those one loved. The mighty cry spread from pole to pole, ascended and filled all the regions of space : To be happy, happy for evermore, both in life and in death !

And Pierre saw the suffering beings around him lose all perception of the jolting and recover their strength as league by league they drew nearer to the miracle. Even Madame Maze grew talkative, certain as she felt that the Blessed Virgin would restore her husband to her. With a smile on her face Madame Vincent gently rocked her little Rose in her arms, thinking that she was not nearly so ill as those all but lifeless children who, after being plunged in the icy water, sprang out and played. M. Sabathier jested with M. de Guersaint, and explained to him that, next October, when he had recovered the use of his legs, he should go on a trip to Rome—a journey which he had been postponing for fifteen years and more. Madame Vêtu, quite calmed, feeling nothing but a slight twinge in the stomach, imagined that she was hungry, and asked Madame de Jonquière to let her dip some strips of bread in a glass of milk ; whilst Elise Rouquet, forgetting her sores, ate some grapes, with face uncovered. And in La Grivotte who was sitting up and Brother Isidore who had ceased moaning, all those fine

stories had left a pleasant fever, to such a point that, impatient to be cured, they grew anxious to know the time. For a minute also the man, the strange man, resuscitated. Whilst Sister Hyacinthe was again wiping the cold sweat from his brow, he raised his eyelids, and a smile momentarily brightened his pallid countenance. Yet once again he, also, had hoped.

Marie was still holding Pierre's fingers in her own small, warm hand. It was seven o'clock, they were not due at Bordeaux till half-past seven; and the belated train was quickening its pace yet more and more, rushing along with wild speed in order to make up for the minutes it had lost. The storm had ended by coming down, and now a gentle light of infinite purity fell from the vast clear heavens.

"Oh! how beautiful it is, Pierre—how beautiful it is!" Marie again repeated, pressing his hand with tender affection. And leaning towards him, she added in an undertone: "I beheld the Blessed Virgin a little while ago, Pierre, and it was your cure that I implored and shall obtain."

The priest, who understood her meaning, was thrown into confusion by the divine light which gleamed in her eyes as she fixed them on his own. She had forgotten her own sufferings; that which she had asked for was his conversion; and that prayer of faith, emanating, pure and candid, from that dear, suffering creature, upset his soul. Yet why should he not believe some day? He himself had been distracted by all those extraordinary narratives. The stifling heat of the carriage had made

him dizzy, the sight of all the woe heaped up there caused his heart to bleed with pity. And contagion was doing its work; he no longer knew where the real and the possible ceased, he lacked the power to disentangle such a mass of stupefying facts, to explain such as admitted of explanation and reject the others. At one moment, indeed, as a hymn once more resounded and carried him off with its stubborn importunate rhythm, he ceased to be master of himself, and imagined that he was at last beginning to believe amidst the hallucinatory vertigo which reigned in that travelling hospital, rolling, ever rolling onward at full speed.

V

BERNADETTE

THE train left Bordeaux after a stoppage of a few minutes, during which those who had not dined hastened to purchase some provisions. Moreover, the ailing ones were constantly drinking milk, and asking for biscuits, like little children. And, as soon as they were off again, Sister Hyacinthe clapped her hands, and exclaimed: "Come, let us make haste; the evening prayer."

Thereupon, during a quarter of an hour came a confused murmuring, made up of "Paters" and "Aves," self-examinations, acts of contrition, and vows of trustful reliance in God, the Blessed Virgin, and the Saints, with thanksgiving for protection and preservation that day, and, at last, a prayer for the living and for the faithful departed.

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

It was ten minutes past eight o'clock, the shades of night were already bedimming the landscape—a vast plain which the evening mist seemed to prolong into the infinite, and where, far away, bright dots of light shone out from the windows of lonely, scattered

houses. In the carriage, the lights of the lamps were flickering, casting a subdued yellow glow on the luggage and the pilgrims, who were sorely shaken by the spreading tendency of the train's motion.

"You know, my children," resumed Sister Hyacinthe, who had remained standing, "I shall order silence when we get to Lamothe, in about an hour's time. So you have an hour to amuse yourselves, but you must be reasonable and not excite yourselves too much. And when we have passed Lamothe, you hear me, there must not be another word, another sound, you must all go to sleep."

This made them laugh.

"Oh! but it is the rule, you know," added the Sister, "and surely you have too much sense not to obey me."

Since the morning they had punctually fulfilled the programme of religious exercises specified for each successive hour. And now that all the prayers had been said, the beads told, the hymns chanted, the day's duties were over, and a brief interval for recreation was allowed before sleeping. They were, however, at a loss as to what they should do.

"Sister," suddenly said Marie, "if you would allow Monsieur l'Abbé to read to us—he reads extremely well,—and as it happens I have a little book with me—a history of Bernadette which is so interesting——"

The others did nor let her finish, but with the suddenly awakened desire of children to whom a beautiful story has been promised, loudly exclaimed: "Oh! yes, Sister. Oh! yes, Sister——"

"Of course I will allow it," replied Sister Hyacinthe, "since it is a question of reading something instructive and edifying."

Pierre was obliged to consent. But to be able to read the book he wished to be under the lamp, and it was necessary that he should change seats with M. de Guersaint, whom the promise of a story had delighted as much as it did the ailing ones. And when the young priest, after changing seats and declaring that he would be able to see well enough, at last opened the little book, a quiver of curiosity sped from one end of the carriage to the other, and every head was stretched out, lending ear with rapt attention. Fortunately, Pierre had a clear, powerful voice and made himself distinctly heard above the wheels, which, now that the train travelled across a vast level plain, gave out but a subdued, rumbling sound.

Before beginning, however, the young priest had examined the book. It was one of those little works of propaganda issued from the Catholic printing-presses and circulated in profusion throughout all Christendom. Badly printed, on wretched paper, it was adorned on its blue cover with a little wood-cut of Our Lady of Lourdes, a naïve design alike stiff and awkward. The book itself was short, and half an hour would certainly suffice to read it from cover to cover without hurrying.

Accordingly, in his fine, clear voice, with its penetrating, musical tones, he began his perusal as follows:—

"It happened at Lourdes, a little town near the

Pyrenees, on a Thursday, February 11, 1858. The weather was cold, and somewhat cloudy, and in the humble home of a poor but honest miller named François Soubirous there was no wood to cook the dinner. The miller's wife, Louise, said to her younger daughter Marie, 'Go and gather some wood on the bank of the Gave or on the common-land.' The Gave is a torrent which passes through Lourdes.

"Marie had an elder sister, named Bernadette, who had lately arrived from the country, where some worthy villagers had employed her as a shepherdess. She was a slender, delicate, extremely innocent child, and knew nothing except her rosary. Louise Soubirous hesitated to send her out with her sister, on account of the cold, but at last, yielding to the entreaties of Marie and a young girl of the neighbourhood called Jeanne Abadie, she consented to let her go.

"Following the bank of the torrent and gathering stray fragments of dead wood, the three maidens at last found themselves in front of the Grotto, hollowed out in a huge mass of rock which the people of the district called Massabielle."

Pierre had reached this point and was turning the page when he suddenly paused and let the little book fall on his knees. The childish character of the narrative, its ready-made, empty phraseology, filled him with impatience. He himself possessed quite a collection of documents concerning this extraordinary story, had passionately studied even its most trifling details, and in the depths of his heart retained a feel-

ing of tender affection and infinite pity for Bernadette. He had just reflected, too, that on the very next day he would be able to begin that decisive inquiry which he had formerly dreamt of making at Lourdes. In fact, this was one of the reasons which had induced him to accompany Marie on her journey. And he was now conscious of an awakening of all his curiosity respecting the Visionary, whom he loved because he felt that she had been a girl of candid soul, truthful and ill-fated, though at the same time he would much have liked to analyse and explain her case. Assuredly, she had not lied, she had indeed beheld a vision and heard voices, like Joan of Arc; and like Joan of Arc also, she was now, in the opinion of the devout, accomplishing the deliverance of France—from sin if not from invaders. Pierre wondered what force could have produced her—her and her work. How was it that the visionary faculty had become developed in that lowly girl, so distracting believing souls as to bring about a renewal of the miracles of primitive times, as to found almost a new religion in the midst of a Holy City, built at an outlay of millions, and ever invaded by crowds of worshippers more numerous and more exalted in mind than had ever been known since the days of the Crusades?

And so, ceasing to read the book, Pierre began to tell his companions all that he knew, all that he had divined and reconstructed of that story which is yet so obscure despite the vast rivers of ink which it has already caused to flow. He knew the country and its manners and customs, through his long conversa-

tions with his friend Doctor Chassaigne. And he was endowed with charming fluency of language, an emotional power of exquisite purity, many remarkable gifts well fitting him to be a pulpit orator, which he never made use of, although he had known them to be within him ever since his seminary days. When the occupants of the carriage perceived that he knew the story, far better and in far greater detail than it appeared in Marie's little book, and that he related it also in such a gentle yet passionate way, there came an increase of attention, and all those afflicted souls hungering for happiness went forth towards him. First came the story of Bernadette's childhood at Bartrès, where she had grown up in the abode of her foster-mother, Madame Lagûes, who, having lost an infant of her own, had rendered those poor folks, the Soubirouses, the service of suckling and keeping their child for them. Bartrès, a village of four hundred souls, at a league or so from Lourdes, lay as it were in a desert oasis, sequestered amidst greenery, and far from any frequented highway. The road dips down, the few houses are scattered over grassland, divided by hedges and planted with walnut and chestnut trees, whilst the clear rivulets, which are never silent, follow the sloping banks beside the pathways, and nothing rises on high save the small ancient romanesque church, which is perched on a hillock, covered with graves. Wooded slopes undulate upon all sides. Bartrès lies in a hollow amidst grass of delicious freshness, grass of intense greenness, which is ever moist at the roots, thanks to the eternal subterraneous expanse of water

which is fed by the mountain torrents. And Bernadette, who, since becoming a big girl, had paid for her keep by tending lambs, was wont to take them with her, season after season, through all the greenery where she never met a soul. It was only now and then, from the summit of some slope, that she saw the far-away mountains, the Pic du Midi, the Pic de Viscos, those masses which rose up, bright or gloomy, according to the weather, and which stretched away to other peaks, lightly and faintly coloured, vaguely and confusedly outlined, like apparitions seen in dreams.

Then came the home of the Lagûeses, where her cradle was still preserved, a solitary, silent house, the last of the village. A meadow planted with pear and apple trees, and only separated from the open country by a narrow stream which one could jump across, stretched out in front of the house. Inside the latter, a low and damp abode, there were, on either side of the wooden stairway leading to the loft, but two spacious rooms, flagged with stones, and each containing four or five beds. The girls, who slept together, fell asleep at even, gazing at the fine pictures affixed to the walls, whilst the big clock in its pinewood case gravely struck the hours in the midst of the deep silence.

Ah ! those years at Bartrès ; in what sweet peacefulness did Bernadette live them ! Yet she grew up very thin, always in bad health, suffering from a nervous asthma which stifled her in the least veering of the wind ; and on attaining her twelfth year she could neither read nor write, nor speak otherwise

than in dialect, having remained quite infantile, behindhand in mind as in body. She was a very good little girl, very gentle and well behaved, and but little different from other children, except that instead of talking she preferred to listen. Limited as was her intelligence, she often evinced much natural common-sense, and at times was prompt in her *réparties*, with a kind of simple gaiety which made one smile. It was only with infinite trouble that she was taught her rosary, and when she knew it she seemed bent on carrying her knowledge no further, but repeated it all day long, so that whenever you met her with her lambs, she invariably had her chaplet between her fingers, diligenly telling each successive "Pater" and "Ave." For long, long hours she lived like this on the grassy slopes of the hills, hidden away and haunted as it were amidst the mysteries of the foliage, seeing nought of the world save the crests of the distant mountains, which, for an instant, every now and then, would soar aloft in the radiant light, as ethereal as the peaks of dreamland.

Days followed days, and Bernadette roamed, dreaming her one narrow dream, repeating the sole prayer she knew, which gave her amidst her solitude, so fresh and naïvely infantile, no other companion and friend than the Blessed Virgin. But what pleasant evenings she spent in the winter-time in the room on the left, where a fire was kept burning! Her foster-mother had a brother, a priest, who occasionally read some marvellous stories to them—stories of saints, prodigious adventures of a kind to make one tremble with mingled fear and joy,

in which Paradise appeared upon earth, whilst the heavens opened and a glimpse was caught of the splendour of the angels. The books he brought with him were often full of pictures—God the Father enthroned amidst His glory; Jesus, so gentle and so handsome with His beaming face; the Blessed Virgin, who recurred again and again, radiant with splendour, clad now in white, now in azure, now in gold, and ever so amiable that Bernadette would see her again in her dreams. But the book which was read more than all others was the Bible, an old Bible which had been in the family for more than a hundred years, and which time and usage had turned yellow. Each winter evening Bernadette's foster-father, the only member of the household who had learnt to read, would take a pin, pass it at random between the leaves of the book, open the latter, and then start reading from the top of the right-hand page, amidst the deep attention of both the women and the children, who ended by knowing the book by heart, and could have continued reciting it without a single mistake.

However, Bernadette, for her part, preferred the religious works in which the Blessed Virgin constantly appeared with her engaging smile. True, one reading of a different character amused her, that of the marvellous story of the Four Brothers Aymon. On the yellow paper cover of the little book, which had doubtless fallen from the bale of some peddler who had lost his way in that remote region, there was a naïve cut showing the four doughty knights, Renaud and his brothers, all mounted on Bayard,

their famous battle charger, that princely present made to them by the fairy Orlanda. And inside were narratives of bloody fights, of the building and besieging of fortresses, of the terrible swordthrusts exchanged by Roland and Renaud, who was at last about to free the Holy Land, without mentioning the tales of Maugis the Magician and his marvellous enchantments, and the Princess Clarisse, the King of Aquitaine's sister, who was more lovely than sunlight. Her imagination fired by such stories as these, Bernadette often found it difficult to get to sleep; and this was especially the case on the evenings when the books were left aside, and some person of the company related a tale of witchcraft. The girl was very superstitious, and after sundown could never be prevailed upon to pass near a tower in the vicinity, which was said to be haunted by the fiend. For that matter, all the folks of the region were superstitious, devout, and simple-minded, the whole countryside being peopled, so to say, with mysteries—trees which sang, stones from which blood flowed, cross-roads where it was necessary to say three "Paters" and three "Aves," if you did not wish to meet the seven-horned beast who carried maidens off to perdition. And what a wealth of terrifying stories there was! Hundreds of stories, so that there was no finishing on the evenings when somebody started them. First came the wehrwolf adventures, the tales of the unhappy men whom the demon forced to enter into the bodies of dogs, the great white dogs of the mountains. If you fire a gun at the dog and a single shot should strike him,

the man will be delivered ; but if the shot should fall on the dog's shadow, the man will immediately die. Then came the endless procession of sorcerers and sorceresses. In one of these tales Bernadette evinced a passionate interest ; it was the story of a clerk of the tribunal of Lourdes who, wishing to see the devil, was conducted by a witch into an untilled field at midnight on Good Friday. The devil arrived clad in magnificent scarlet garments, and at once proposed to the clerk that he should buy his soul, an offer which the clerk pretended to accept. It so happened that the devil was carrying under his arm a register in which different persons of the town, who had already sold themselves, had signed their names. However, the clerk, who was a cunning fellow, pulled out of his pocket a pretended bottle of ink, which in reality contained holy water, and with this he sprinkled the devil, who raised frightful shrieks, whilst the clerk took to flight, carrying the register off with him. Then began a wild, mad race, which might last throughout the night, over the mountains, through the valleys, across the forests and the torrents. "Give me back my register!" shouted the fiend. "No, you sha'n't have it!" replied the clerk. And again and again it began afresh: "Give me back my register!"—"No, you sha'n't have it!" And at last, finding himself out of breath, near the point of succumbing, the clerk, who had his plan, threw himself into the cemetery, which was consecrated ground, and was there able to deride the devil at his ease, waving the register which he had purloined so as to save the souls of all the unhappy

people who had signed their names in it. On the evening when this story was told, Bernadette, before surrendering herself to sleep, would mentally repeat her rosary, delighted with the thought that hell should have been baffled, though she trembled at the idea that it would surely return to prowl around her, as soon as the lamp should have been put out.

Throughout one winter, the long evenings were spent in the church. Abbé Ader, the village priest, had authorised it, and many families came, in order to economise oil and candles. Moreover, they felt less cold when gathered together in this fashion. The Bible was read, and prayers were repeated, whilst the children ended by falling asleep. Bernadette alone struggled on to the finish, so pleased she was at being there, in that narrow nave whose slender nervures were coloured blue and red. At the farther end was the altar, also painted and gilded, with its twisted columns and its screens on which appeared the Virgin and Ste. Anne, and the beheading of St. John the Baptist—the whole of a gaudy and somewhat barbaric splendour. And as sleepiness grew upon her, the child must have often seen a mystical vision as it were of those crudely coloured designs rising before her—have seen the blood flowing from St. John's severed head, have seen the aureolas shining, the Virgin ever returning and gazing at her with her blue, living eyes, and looking as though she were on the point of opening her vermilion lips in order to speak to her. For some months Bernadette spent her evenings in this wise, half asleep in front of that sumptuous, vaguely defined altar, in

the incipiency of a divine dream which she carried away with her, and finished in bed, slumbering peacefully under the watchful care of her guardian angel.

And it was also in that old church, so humble yet so impregnated with ardent faith, that Bernadette began to learn her catechism. She would soon be fourteen now, and must think of her first communion. Her foster-mother, who had the reputation of being avaricious, did not send her to school, but employed her in or about the house from morning till evening. M. Barbet, the schoolmaster, never saw her at his classes, though one day, when he gave the catechism lesson, in the place of Abbé Ader who was indisposed, he remarked her on account of her piety and modesty. The village priest was very fond of Bernadette and often spoke of her to the schoolmaster, saying that he could never look at her without thinking of the children of La Salette, since they must have been good, candid, and pious as she was, for the Blessed Virgin to have appeared to them.[1] On another occasion whilst the two men were walking one morning near the village, and saw Bernadette disappear with her little flock under some spreading trees in the distance, the Abbé repeatedly

[1] It was on September 19, 1846, that the Virgin is said to have appeared in the ravine of La Sezia, adjacent to the valley of La Salette, between Corps and Eutraigues, in the department of the Isère. The visionaries were Mélanie Mathieu, a girl of fourteen, and Maximin Giraud, a boy of twelve. The local clergy speedily endorsed the story of the miracle, and thousands of people still go every year in pil-

turned round to look for her, and again remarked: "I cannot account for it, but every time I meet that child it seems to me as if I saw Mélanie, the young shepherdess, little Maximin's companion." He was certainly beset by this singular idea, which became, so to say, a prediction. Moreover, had he not one day after catechism, or one evening, when the villagers were gathered in the church, related that marvellous story which was already twelve years old, that story of the Lady in the dazzling robes who walked upon the grass without even making it bend, the Blessed Virgin who showed herself to Mélanie and Maximin on the banks of a stream in the mountains, and confided to them a great secret and announced the anger of her Son? Ever since that day a source had sprung up from the tears which she had shed, a source which cured all ailments, whilst the secret, inscribed on parchment fastened with three seals, slumbered at Rome! And Bernadette, no doubt, with her dreamy, silent air, had listened passionately to that wonderful tale and carried it off with her into the desert of foliage where she spent her days, so that she might live it over again as she walked along behind her lambs with her rosary, slipping bead by bead between her slender fingers.

Thus her childhood ran its course at Bartrès.

grimage to a church overlooking the valley, and bathe and drink at a so-called miraculous source. Two priests of Grenoble, however, Abbé Déléon and Abbé Cartellier, accused a Mdlle. de Lamerlière of having concocted the miracle, and when she took proceedings against them for libel she lost her case.—*Trans.*

That which delighted one in this Bernadette, so poor-blooded, so slight of build, was her ecstatic eyes, beautiful visionary eyes, from which dreams soared aloft like birds winging their flight in a pure limpid sky. Her mouth was large, with lips somewhat thick, expressive of kindliness; her square-shaped head had a straight brow, and was covered with thick black hair, whilst her face would have seemed rather common but for its charming expression of gentle obstinacy. Those who did not gaze into her eyes, however, gave her no thought. To them she was but an ordinary child, a poor thing of the roads, a girl of reluctant growth, timidly humble in her ways. Assuredly it was in her glance that Abbé Ader had with agitation detected the stifling ailment which filled her puny, girlish form with suffering—that ailment born of the greeny solitude in which she had grown up, the gentleness of her bleating lambs, the Angelic Salutation which she had carried with her, hither and thither, under the sky, repeating and repeating it to the point of hallucination, the prodigious stories, too, which she had heard folks tell at her foster-mother's, the long evenings spent before the living altar-screens in the church, and all the atmosphere of primitive faith which she had breathed in that far-away rural region, hemmed in by mountains.

At last, on one seventh of January, Bernadette had just reached her fourteenth birthday, when her parents, finding that she learnt nothing at Bartrès, resolved to bring her back to Lourdes for good, in order that she might diligently study her cate-

chism, and in this wise seriously prepare herself for her first communion. And so it happened that she had already been at Lourdes some fifteen or twenty days, when on February 11, a Thursday, cold and somewhat cloudy——

But Pierre could carry his narrative no further, for Sister Hyacinthe had risen to her feet and was vigorously clapping her hands. "My children," she exclaimed, "it is past nine o'clock. Silence! silence!"

The train had indeed just passed Lamothe, and was rolling with a dull rumble across a sea of darkness—the endless plains of the Landes which the night submerged. For ten minutes already not a sound ought to have been heard in the carriage, one and all ought to have been sleeping or suffering uncomplainingly. However, a mutiny broke out.

"Oh! Sister!" exclaimed Marie, whose eyes were sparkling, "allow us just another short quarter of an hour! We have got to the most interesting part."

Ten, twenty voices took up the cry: "Oh yes, Sister, please do let us have another short quarter of an hour!"

They all wished to hear the continuation, burning with as much curiosity as though they had not known the story, so captivated were they by the touches of compassionate human feeling which Pierre introduced into his narrative. Their glances never left him, all their heads were stretched towards him, fantastically illumined by the flickering light of the lamps. And it was not only the sick who displayed

this interest; the ten women occupying the compartment at the far end of the carriage had also become impassioned, and, happy at not missing a single word, turned their poor ugly faces now beautified by naïve faith.

"No, I cannot!" Sister Hyacinthe at first declared; "the rules are very strict—you must be silent."

However, she weakened, she herself feeling so interested in the tale that she could detect her heart beating under her stomacher. Then Marie again repeated her request in an entreating tone; whilst her father, M. de Guersaint, who had listened like one hugely amused, declared that they would all fall ill if the story were not continued. And thereupon, seeing Madame de Jonquière smile with an indulgent air, Sister Hyacinthe ended by consenting.

"Well, then," said she, "I will allow you another short quarter of an hour; but only a short quarter of an hour, mind. That is understood, is it not? For I should otherwise be in fault."

Pierre had waited quietly without attempting to intervene. And he resumed his narrative in the same penetrating voice as before, a voice in which his own doubts were softened by pity for those who suffer and who hope.

The scene of the story was now transferred to Lourdes, to the Rue des Petits Fossés, a narrow, tortuous, mournful street taking a downward course between humble houses and roughly plastered dead walls. The Soubirous family occupied a single room on the ground floor of one of these sorry habitations,

a room at the end of a dark passage, in which seven persons were huddled together, the father, the mother, and five children. You could scarcely see in the chamber; from the tiny, damp inner courtyard of the house there came but a greenish light. And in that room they slept, all of a heap; and there also they ate, when they had bread. For some time past, the father, a miller by trade, could only with difficulty obtain work as a journeyman. And it was from that dark hole, that lowly wretchedness, that Bernadette, the elder girl, with Marie, her sister, and Jeanne, a little friend of the neighbourhood, went out to pick up dead wood, on the cold February Thursday already spoken of.

Then the beautiful tale was unfolded at length; how the three girls followed the bank of the Gave from the other side of the castle, and how they ended by finding themselves on the Ile du Chalet in front of the rock of Massabielle, from which they were only separated by the narrow stream diverted from the Gave, and used for working the mill of Sâvy. It was a wild spot, whither the common herdsman often brought the pigs of the neighbourhood, which, when showers suddenly came on, would take shelter under this rock of Massabielle, at whose base there was a kind of grotto of no great depth, blocked at the entrance by eglantine and brambles. The girls found dead wood very scarce that day, but at last on seeing on the other side of the stream quite a gleaning of branches deposited there by the torrent, Marie and Jeanne crossed over through the water; whilst Bernadette, more delicate than they were, a trifle

young-ladyfied, perhaps, remained on the bank lamenting, and not daring to wet her feet. She was suffering slightly from humour in the head, and her mother had expressly bidden her to wrap herself in her *capulet*,[1] a large white *capulet* which contrasted vividly with her old black woollen dress. When she found that her companions would not help her, she resignedly made up her mind to take off her *sabots*, and pull down her stockings. It was then about noon, the three strokes of the Angelus rang out from the parish church, rising into the broad calm winter sky, which was somewhat veiled by fine fleecy clouds. And it was then that a great agitation arose within her, resounding in her ears with such a tempestuous roar that she fancied a hurricane had descended from the mountains, and was passing over her. But she looked at the trees and was stupefied, for not a leaf was stirring. Then she thought that she had been mistaken, and was about to pick up her *sabots*, when again the great gust swept through her; but, this time, the disturbance in her ears reached her eyes, she no longer saw the trees, but was dazzled by a whiteness, a kind of bright light which seemed to her to settle itself against the rock, in a narrow, lofty slit above the Grotto, not unlike an ogival window of a cathedral. In her fright she fell upon her knees. What could it be, *mon Dieu?* Sometimes, during bad weather, when her asthma oppressed her more than usual, she spent

[1] This is a kind of hood, more generally known among the Bearnese peasantry as a *sarot*. Whilst forming a coif it also completely covers the back and shoulders.—*Trans.*

very bad nights, incessantly dreaming dreams which were often painful, and whose stifling effect she retained on awaking, even when she had ceased to remember anything. Flames would surround her, the sun would flash before her face. Had she dreamt in that fashion during the previous night? Was this the continuation of some forgotten dream? However, little by little a form became outlined, she believed that she could distinguish a figure which the vivid light rendered intensely white. In her fear lest it should be the devil, for her mind was haunted by tales of witchcraft, she began to tell her beads. And when the light had slowly faded away, and she had crossed the canal and joined Marie and Jeanne, she was surprised to find that neither of them had seen anything whilst they were picking up the wood in front of the Grotto. On their way back to Lourdes the three girls talked together. So she, Bernadette, had seen something then? What was it? At first, feeling uneasy, and somewhat ashamed, she would not answer; but at last she said that she had seen something white.

From this the rumours started and grew. The Soubirouses, on being made acquainted with the circumstance, evinced much displeasure at such childish nonsense, and told their daughter that she was not to return to the rock of Massabielle. All the children of the neighbourhood, however, were already repeating the tale, and when Sunday came the parents had to give way, and allow Bernadette to betake herself to the Grotto with a bottle of holy water to ascertain if it were really the devil whom

one had to deal with. She then again beheld the light, the figure became more clearly defined, and smiled upon her, evincing no fear whatever of the holy water. And, on the ensuing Thursday, she once more returned to the spot accompanied by several persons, and then for the first time the radiant lady assumed sufficient corporality to speak, and say to her: "Do me the kindness to come here for fifteen days."

Thus, little by little, the lady had assumed a precise appearance. The something clad in white had become indeed a lady more beautiful than a queen, of a kind such as is only seen in pictures. At first, in presence of the questions with which all the neighbours plied her from morning till evening, Bernadette had hesitated, disturbed, perhaps, by scruples of conscience. But then, as though prompted by the very interrogatories to which she was subjected, she seemed to perceive the figure which she had beheld, more plainly, so that it definitely assumed life, with lines and hues from which the child, in her after-descriptions, never departed. The lady's eyes were blue and very mild, her mouth was rosy and smiling, the oval of her face expressed both the grace of youth and of maternity. Below the veil covering her head and falling to her heels, only a glimpse was caught of her admirable fair hair, which was slightly curled. Her robe, which was of dazzling whiteness, must have been of some material unknown on earth, some material woven of the sun's rays. Her sash, of the same hue as the heavens, was fastened loosely about her, its long ends stream-

ing downwards, with the light airiness of morning. Her chaplet, wound about her right arm, had beads of a milky whiteness, whilst the links and the cross were of gold. And on her bare feet, on her adorable feet of virgin snow, flowered two golden roses, the mystic roses of this divine mother's immaculate flesh.

Where was it that Bernadette had seen this Blessed Virgin, of such traditionally simple composition, unadorned by a single jewel, having but the primitive grace imagined by the painters of a people in its childhood? In which illustrated book belonging to her foster-mother's brother, the good priest, who read such attractive stories, had she beheld this Virgin? Or in what picture, or what statuette, or what stained-glass window of the painted and gilded church where she had spent so many evenings whilst growing up? And whence, above all things, had come those golden roses poised on the Virgin's feet, that piously imagined florescence of woman's flesh—from what romance of chivalry, from what story told after catechism by the Abbé Ader, from what unconscious dream indulged in under the shady foliage of Bartrès, whilst ever and ever repeating that haunting Angelic Salutation?

Pierre's voice had acquired a yet more feeling tone, for if he did not say all these things to the simple-minded folks who were listening to him, still the human explanation of all these prodigies which the feeling of doubt in the depths of his being strove to supply, imparted to his narrative a quiver of sympathetic, fraternal love. He loved Bernadette the better for the great charm of her hallucination—that

lady of such gracious access, such perfect amiability, such politeness in appearing and disappearing so appropriately. At first the great light would show itself, then the vision took form, came and went, leant forward, moved about, floating imperceptibly, with ethereal lightness; and when it vanished the glow lingered for yet another moment, and then disappeared like a star fading away. No lady in this world could have such a white and rosy face, with a beauty so akin to that of the Virgins on the picture-cards given to children at their first communions. And it was strange that the eglantine of the Grotto did not even hurt her adorable bare feet blooming with golden flowers.

Pierre, however, at once proceeded to recount the other apparitions. The fourth and fifth occurred on the Friday and the Saturday; but the Lady, who shone so brightly and who had not yet told her name, contented herself on these occasions with smiling and saluting without pronouncing a word. On the Sunday, however, she wept, and said to Bernadette, "Pray for sinners." On the Monday, to the child's great grief, she did not appear, wishing, no doubt, to try her. But on the Tuesday she confided to her a secret which concerned her (the girl) alone, a secret which she was never to divulge[1]; and then she at last told her what mission it was that

[1] In a like way, it will be remembered, the apparition at La Salette confided a secret to Mélanie and Maximin (see *ante*, note, p. 136). There can be little doubt that Bernadette was acquainted with the story of the miracle of La Salette. —*Trans.*

she entrusted to her: "Go and tell the priests," she said, "that they must build a chapel here." On the Wednesday she frequently murmured the word "Penitence! penitence! penitence!" which the child repeated, afterwards kissing the earth. On the Thursday the Lady said to her: "Go, and drink, and wash at the spring, and eat of the grass that is beside it," words which the Visionary ended by understanding, when in the depths of the Grotto a source suddenly sprang up beneath her fingers. And this was the miracle of the enchanted fountain.

Then the second week ran its course. The lady did not appear on the Friday, but was punctual on the five following days, repeating her commands and gazing with a smile at the humble girl whom she had chosen to do her bidding, and who, on her side, duly told her beads at each apparition, kissed the earth, and repaired on her knees to the source, there to drink and wash. At last, on Thursday, March 4, the last day of these mystical assignations, the Lady requested more pressingly than before that a chapel might be erected in order that the nations might come thither in procession from all parts of the earth. So far, however, in reply to all Bernadette's appeals, she had refused to say who she was; and it was only three weeks later, on Thursday, March 25, that, joining her hands together, and raising her eyes to Heaven, she said: "I am the Immaculate Conception." On two other occasions, at somewhat long intervals, April 7 and July 16, she again appeared: the first time to perform the miracle of the lighted taper, that taper above which the child,

plunged in ecstasy, for a long time unconsciously left her hand, without burning it; and the second time to bid Bernadette farewell, to favour her with a last smile, and a last inclination of the head full of charming politeness. This made eighteen apparitions all told; and never again did the Lady show herself.

Whilst Pierre went on with his beautiful, marvellous story, so soothing to the wretched, he evoked for himself a vision of that pitiable, lovable Bernadette, whose sufferings had flowered so wonderfully. As a doctor had roughly expressed it, this girl of fourteen, at a critical period of her life, already ravaged, too, by asthma, was, after all, simply an exceptional victim of hysteria, afflicted with a degenerate heredity and lapsing into infancy. If there were no violent crises in her case, if there were no stiffening of the muscles during her attacks, if she retained a precise recollection of her dreams, the reason was that her case was peculiar to herself, and she added, so to say, a new and very curious form to all the forms of hysteria known at the time. Miracles only begin when things cannot be explained; and science, so far, knows and can explain so little, so infinitely do the phenomena of disease vary according to the nature of the patient! But how many shepherdesses there had been before Bernadette who had seen the Virgin in a similar way, amidst all the same childish nonsense! Was it not always the same story, the Lady clad in light, the secret confided, the spring bursting forth, the mission which had to be fulfilled, the miracles whose

enchantments would convert the masses? And was not the personal appearance of the Virgin always in accordance with a poor child's dreams—akin to some coloured figure in a missal, an ideal compounded of traditional beauty, gentleness, and politeness. And the same dreams showed themselves in the naïveté of the means which were to be employed and of the object which was to be attained—the deliverance of nations, the building of churches, the processional pilgrimages of the faithful! Then, too, all the words which fell from Heaven resembled one another, calls for penitence, promises of help; and in this respect, in Bernadette's case the only new feature was that most extraordinary declaration: "I am the Immaculate Conception," which burst forth—very usefully—as the recognition by the Blessed Virgin herself of the dogma promulgated by the Court of Rome but three years previously! It was not the Immaculate Virgin who appeared: no, it was the Immaculate Conception, the abstraction itself, the thing, the dogma, so that one might well ask oneself if really the Virgin had spoken in such a fashion. As for the other words, it was possible that Bernadette had heard them somewhere and stored them up in some unconscious nook of her memory. But these—"I am the Immaculate Conception"—whence had they come as though expressly to fortify a dogma—still bitterly discussed—with such prodigious support as the direct testimony of the Mother conceived without sin? At this thought, Pierre, who was convinced of Bernadette's absolute good faith, who refused to believe that she had been the instrument of

a fraud, began to waver, deeply agitated, feeling his belief in truth totter within him.

The apparitions, however, had caused intense emotion at Lourdes; crowds flocked to the spot, miracles began, and those inevitable persecutions broke out which ensure the triumph of new religions. Abbé Peyramale, the parish priest of Lourdes, an extremely honest man, with an upright, vigorous mind, was able in all truth to declare that he did not know this child, that she had not yet been seen at catechism. Where was the pressure, then, where the lesson learnt by heart? There was nothing but those years of childhood spent at Bartrès, the first teachings of Abbé Ader, conversations possibly, religious ceremonies in honour of the recently proclaimed dogma, or simply the gift of one of those commemorative medals which had been scattered in profusion. Never did Abbé Ader reappear upon the scene, he who had predicted the mission of the future Visionary. He was destined to remain apart from Bernadette and her future career, he who, the first, had seen her little soul blossom in his pious hands. And yet all the unknown forces that had sprung from that sequestered village, from that nook of greenery where superstition and poverty of intelligence prevailed, were still making themselves felt, disturbing the brains of men, disseminating the contagion of the mysterious. It was remembered that a shepherd of Argelès, speaking of the rock of Massabielle, had prophesied that great things would take place there. Other children, moreover, now fell in ecstasy with their eyes dilated and their limbs

quivering with convulsions, but these only saw the devil. A whirlwind of madness seemed to be passing over the region. An old lady of Lourdes declared that Bernadette was simply a witch and that she had herself seen the toad's foot in her eye. But for the others, for the thousands of pilgrims who hastened to the spot, she was a saint, and they kissed her garments. Sobs burst forth and frenzy seemed to seize upon the souls of the beholders, when she fell upon her knees before the Grotto, a lighted taper in her right hand, whilst with the left she told the beads of her rosary. She became very pale and quite beautiful, transfigured, so to say. Her features gently ascended in her face, lengthened into an expression of extraordinary beatitude, whilst her eyes filled with light, and her lips parted as though she were speaking words which could not be heard. And it was quite certain that she had no will of her own left her, penetrated as she was by a dream, possessed by it to such a point in the confined, exclusive sphere in which she lived, that she continued dreaming it even when awake, and thus accepted it as the only indisputable reality, prepared to testify to it even at the cost of her blood, repeating it over and over again, obstinately, stubbornly clinging to it, and never varying in the details she gave. She did not lie, for she did not know, could not and would not desire anything apart from it.

Forgetful of the flight of time, Pierre was now sketching a charming picture of old Lourdes, that pious little town, slumbering at the foot of the Pyrenees. The castle, perched on a rock at the point of

intersection of the seven valleys of Lavedan, had formerly been the key of the mountain districts. But, in Bernadette's time, it had become a mere dismantled, ruined pile, at the entrance of a road leading nowhere. Modern life found its march stayed by a formidable rampart of lofty, snow-capped peaks, and only the trans-Pyrenean railway—had it been constructed—could have established an active circulation of social life in that sequestered nook where human existence stagnated like dead water. Forgotten, therefore, Lourdes remained slumbering, happy and sluggish amidst its old-time peacefulness, with its narrow, pebble-paved streets and its bleak houses with dressings of marble. The old roofs were still all massed on the eastern side of the castle ; the Rue de la Grotte, then called the Rue du Bois, was but a deserted and often impassable road ; no houses stretched down to the Gave as now, and the scum-laden waters rolled through a perfect solitude of pollard willows and tall grass. On week-days but few people passed across the Place du Marcadal, such as housewives hastening on errands, and petty cits airing their leisure hours ; and you had to wait till Sundays or fair days to find the inhabitants rigged out in their best clothes and assembled on the Champ Commun, in company with the crowd of graziers who had come down from the distant tablelands with their cattle. During the season when people resort to the Pyrenean waters, the passage of the visitors to Cauterets and Bagnères also brought some animation ; *diligences* passed through the town twice a day, but they came from Pau by a wretched road,

and had to ford the Lapaca, which often overflowed its banks. Then climbing the steep ascent of the Rue Basse, they skirted the terrace of the church, which was shaded by large elms. And what soft peacefulness prevailed in and around that old semi-Spanish church, full of ancient carvings, columns, screens, and statues, peopled with visionary patches of gilding and painted flesh, which time had mellowed and which you faintly discerned as by the light of mystical lamps! The whole population came there to worship, to fill their eyes with the dream of the mysterious. There were no unbelievers, the inhabitants of Lourdes were a people of primitive faith; each corporation marched behind the banner of its saint, brotherhoods of all kinds united the entire town, on festival mornings, in one large Christian family. And, as with some exquisite flower that has grown in the soil of its choice, great purity of life reigned there. There was not even a resort of debauchery for young men to wreck their lives, and the girls, one and all, grew up with the perfume and beauty of innocence, under the eyes of the Blessed Virgin, Tower of Ivory and Seat of Wisdom.

And how well one could understand that Bernadette, born in that holy soil, should flower in it, like one of nature's roses budding in the wayside bushes! She was indeed the very florescence of that region of ancient belief and rectitude; she would certainly not have sprouted elsewhere; she could only appear and develop there, amidst that belated race, amidst the slumberous peacefulness of a childlike people, under the moral discipline of religion. And what in-

tense love at once burst forth all around her! What blind confidence was displayed in her mission, what immense consolation and hope came to human hearts on the very morrow of the first miracles! A long cry of relief had greeted the cure of old Bourriette recovering his sight, and of little Justin Bouhohorts coming to life again in the icy water of the spring. At last, then, the Blessed Virgin was intervening in favour of those who despaired, forcing that unkind mother, Nature, to be just and charitable. This was divine omnipotence returning to reign on earth, sweeping the laws of the world aside in order to work the happiness of the suffering and the poor. The miracles multiplied, blazed forth, from day to day more and more extraordinary, like unimpeachable proof of Bernadette's veracity. And she was, indeed, the rose of the divine garden, whose deeds shed perfume, the rose who beholds all the other flowers of grace and salvation spring into being around her.

Pierre had reached this point of his story, and was again enumerating the miracles, on the point of recounting the prodigious triumph of the Grotto, when Sister Hyacinthe, awaking with a start from the ecstasy into which the narrative had plunged her, hastily rose to her feet. "Really, really," said she, "there is no sense in it. It will soon be eleven o'clock."

This was true. They had left Morceux behind them, and would now soon be at Mont de Marsan. So Sister Hyacinthe clapped her hands once more, and added: "Silence, my children, silence!"

This time they did not dare to rebel, for they felt she was in the right; they were unreasonable. But how greatly they regretted not hearing the continuation, how vexed they were that the story should cease when only half told! The ten women in the farther compartment even let a murmur of disappointment escape them; whilst the sick, their faces still outstretched, their dilated eyes gazing upon the light of hope, seemed to be yet listening. Those miracles which ever and ever returned to their minds and filled them with unlimited, haunting, supernatural joy.

"And don't let me hear anyone breathe, even," added Sister Hyacinthe gaily, "or otherwise I shall impose penance on you."

Madame de Jonquière laughed good-naturedly. "You must obey, my children," she said; "be good and get to sleep, so that you may have strength to pray at the Grotto to-morrow with all your hearts."

Then silence fell, nobody spoke any further; and the only sounds were those of the rumbling of the wheels and the jolting of the train as it was carried along at full speed through the black night.

Pierre, however, was unable to sleep. Beside him, M. de Guersaint was already snoring lightly, looking very happy despite the hardness of his seat. For a time the young priest saw Marie's eyes wide open, still full of all the radiance of the marvels that he had related. For a long while she kept them ardently fixed upon his own, but at last closed them, and then he knew not whether she was sleeping, or

with eyelids simply closed was living the everlasting miracle over again. Some of the sufferers were dreaming aloud, giving vent to bursts of laughter which unconscious moans interrupted. Perhaps they beheld the Archangels opening their flesh to wrest their diseases from them. Others, restless with insomnia, turned over and over, stifling their sobs and gazing fixedly into the darkness. And, with a shudder born of all the mystery he had evoked, Pierre, distracted, no longer master of himself in that delirious sphere of fraternal suffering, ended by hating his very mind, and, drawn into close communion with all those humble folks, sought to believe like them. What could be the use of that physiological inquiry into Bernadette's case, so full of gaps and intricacies? Why should he not accept her as a messenger from the spheres beyond, as one of the elect chosen for the divine mystery? Doctors were but ignorant men with rough and brutal hands, and it would be so delightful to fall asleep in child-like faith, in the enchanted gardens of the impossible. And for a moment indeed he surrendered himself, experiencing a delightful feeling of comfort, no longer seeking to explain anything, but accepting the Visionary with her sumptuous *cortège* of miracles, and relying on God to think and determine for him. Then he looked out through the window, which they did not dare to open on account of the consumptive patients, and beheld the immeasurable night which enwrapped the country across which the train was fleeing. The storm must have burst forth there; the sky was now of an admirable noc-

turnal purity, as though cleansed by the masses of fallen water. Large stars shone out in the dark velvet, alone illumining, with their mysterious gleams, the silent, refreshed fields, which incessantly displayed only the black solitude of slumber. And across the Landes, through the valleys, between the hills, that carriage of wretchedness and suffering rolled on and on, over-heated, pestilential, rueful, and wailing, amidst the serenity of the august night, so lovely and so mild.

They had passed Riscle at one in the morning. Between the jolting, the painful, the hallucinatory silence still continued. At two o'clock, as they reached Vic-de-Bigorre, low moans were heard ; the bad state of the line, with the unbearable spreading tendency of the train's motion, was sorely shaking the patients. It was only at Tarbes, at half-past two, that silence was at length broken, and that morning prayers were said, though black night still reigned around them. There came first the "Pater," and then the "Ave," the "Credo," and the supplication to God to grant them the happiness of a glorious day.

"O God, vouchsafe me sufficient strength that I may avoid all that is evil, do all that is good, and suffer uncomplainingly every pain."

And now there was to be no further stoppage until they reached Lourdes. Barely three more quarters of an hour, and Lourdes, with all its vast hopes, would blaze forth in the midst of that night, so long and cruel. Their painful awakening was enfevered by the thought ; a final agitation arose amidst the

morning discomfort, as the abominable sufferings began afresh.

Sister Hyacinthe, however, was especially anxious about the strange man, whose sweat-covered face she had been continually wiping. He had so far managed to keep alive, she watching him without a pause, never having once closed her eyes, but unremittingly listening to his faint breathing with the stubborn desire to take him to the holy Grotto before he died.

All at once, however, she felt frightened; and addressing Madame de Jonquière, she hastily exclaimed, "Pray pass me the vinegar bottle at once—I can no longer hear him breathe."

For an instant, indeed, the man's faint breathing had ceased. His eyes were still closed, his lips parted; he could not have been paler, he had an ashen hue, and was cold. And the carriage was rolling along with its ceaseless rattle of coupling-irons; the speed of the train seemed even to have increased.

"I will rub his temples," resumed Sister Hyacinthe. "Help me, do!"

But, at a more violent jolt of the train, the man suddenly fell from the seat, face downward.

"Ah! *mon Dieu*, help me, pick him up!"

They picked him up, and found him dead. And they had to seat him in his corner again, with his back resting against the woodwork. He remained there erect, his torso stiffened, and his head wagging slightly at each successive jolt. Thus the train continued carrying him along, with the same thunder-

ing noise of wheels, while the engine, well pleased, no doubt, to be reaching its destination, began whistling shrilly, giving vent to quite a flourish of delirious joy as it sped through the calm night.

And then came the last and seemingly endless half-hour of the journey, in company with that wretched corpse. Two big tears had rolled down Sister Hyacinthe's cheeks, and with her hands joined she had begun to pray. The whole carriage shuddered with teror at sight of that terrible companion who was being taken, too late alas! to the Blessed Virgin.

Hope, however, proved stronger than sorrow or pain, and although all the sufferings there assembled awoke and grew again, irritated by overwhelming weariness, a song of joy nevertheless proclaimed the sufferers' triumphal entry into the Land of Miracles. Amidst the tears which their pains drew from them, the exasperated and howling sick began to chant the "Ave maris Stella" with a growing clamour in which lamentation finally turned into cries of hope.

Marie had again taken Pierre's hand between her little feverish fingers. "Oh, *mon Dieu!*" said she, "to think that poor man is dead, and I feared so much that it was I who would die before arriving. And we are there—there at last!"

The priest was trembling with intense emotion. "It means that you are to be cured, Marie," he replied, "and that I myself shall be cured if you pray for me——"

The engine was now whistling in a yet louder key in the depths of the bluish darkness. They were

nearing their destination. The lights of Lourdes already shone out on the horizon. Then the whole train again sang a canticle—the rhymed story of Bernadette, that endless ballad of six times ten couplets, in which the Angelic Salutation ever returns as a refrain, all besetting and distracting, opening to the human mind the portals of the heaven of ecstasy:—

"It was the hour for ev'ning pray'r;
Soft bells chimed on the chilly air.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"The maid stood on the torrent's bank,
A breeze arose, then swiftly sank.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"And she beheld, e'en as it fell,
The Virgin on Massabielle.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"All white appeared the Lady chaste,
A zone of Heaven round her waist.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"Two golden roses, pure and sweet,
Bloomed brightly on her naked feet.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"Upon her arm, so white and round,
Her chaplet's milky pearls were wound.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!

"The maiden prayed till, from her eyes,
The vision sped to Paradise.
Ave, ave, ave Maria!"

THE SECOND DAY

I

THE TRAIN ARRIVES

It was twenty minutes past three by the clock of the Lourdes railway station, the dial of which was illumined by a reflector. Under the slanting roof sheltering the platform, a hundred yards or so in length, some shadowy forms went to and fro, resignedly waiting. Only a red signal light peeped out of the black countryside, far away.

Two of the promenaders suddenly halted. The taller of them, a Father of the Assumption, none other indeed than the Reverend Father Fourcade, director of the national pilgrimage, who had reached Lourdes on the previous day, was a man of sixty, looking superb in his black cloak with its large hood. His fine head, with its clear, domineering eyes and thick grizzly beard, was the head of a general whom an intelligent determination to conquer inflames. In consequence, however, of a sudden attack of gout he slightly dragged one of his legs, and was leaning on the shoulder of his companion, Dr. Bonamy, the practitioner attached to the Miracle

Verification Office, a short, thick-set man, with a square-shaped, clean-shaven face, which had dull, blurred eyes and a tranquil cast of features.

Father Fourcade had stopped to question the station-master whom he peceived running out of his office. "Will the white train be very late, monsieur?" he asked.

"No, your reverence. It has n't lost more than ten minutes; it will be here at the half-hour. It 's the Bayonne train which worries me; it ought to have passed through already."

So saying, he ran off to give an order; but soon came back again, his slim, nervous figure displaying marked signs of agitation. He lived, indeed, in a state of high fever throughout the period of the great pilgrimages. Apart from the usual service, he that day expected eighteen trains, containing more than fifteen thousand passengers. The grey and the blue trains which had started from Paris the first had already arrived at the regulation hour. But the delay in the arrival of the white train was very troublesome, the more so as the Bayonne express—which passed over the same rails—had not yet been signalled. It was easy to understand, therefore, what incessant watchfulness was necessary, not a second passing without the entire staff of the station being called upon to exercise its vigilance.

"In ten minutes, then?" repeated Father Fourcade.

"Yes, in ten minutes, unless I 'm obliged to close the line!" cried the station-master as he hastened into the telegraph office.

Father Fourcade and the doctor slowly resumed their promenade. The thing which astonished them was that no serious accident had ever happened in the midst of such a fearful scramble. In past times, especially, the most terrible disorder had prevailed. Father Fourcade complacently recalled the first pilgrimage which he had organised and led, in 1875; the terrible endless journey without pillows or mattresses, the patients exhausted, half dead, with no means of reviving them at hand; and then the arrival at Lourdes, the train evacuated in confusion, no *matériel* in readiness, no straps, nor stretchers, nor carts. But now there was a powerful organisation; a hospital awaited the sick, who were no longer reduced to lying upon straw in sheds. What a shock for those unhappy ones! What force of will in the man of faith who led them to the scene of miracles! The reverend Father smiled gently at the thought of the work which he had accomplished.

Then, still leaning on the doctor's shoulder, he began to question him: "How many pilgrims did you have last year?" he asked.

"About two hundred thousand. That is still the average. In the year of the Coronation of the Virgin the figure rose to five hundred thousand. But to bring that about an exceptional occasion was needed with a great effort of propaganda. Such vast masses cannot be collected together every day."

A pause followed, and then Father Fourcade murmured: "No doubt. Still the blessing of Heaven attends our endeavours; our work thrives more and

more. We have collected more than two hundred thousand francs in donations for this journey, and God will be with us, there will be many cures for you to proclaim to-morrow, I am sure of it." Then, breaking off, he inquired: "Has not Father Dargelès come here?"

Dr. Bonamy waved his hand as though to say that he did not know. Father Dargelès was the editor of the "Journal de la Grotte." He belonged to the Order of the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception whom the Bishop had installed at Lourdes and who were the absolute masters there; though, when the Fathers of the Assumption came to the town with the national pilgrimage from Paris, which crowds of faithful Catholics from Cambrai, Arras, Chartres, Troyes, Rheims, Sens, Orleans, Blois, and Poitiers joined, they evinced a kind of affectation in disappearing from the scene. Their omnipotence was no longer felt either at the Grotto or at the Basilica; they seemed to surrender every key together with every responsibility. Their superior, Father Capdebarthe, a tall, peasant-like man, with a knotty frame, a big head which looked as if it had been fashioned with a bill-hook, and a worn face which retained a ruddy mournful reflection of the soil, did not even show himself. Of the whole community you only saw little, insinuating Father Dargelès; but he was met everywhere, incessantly on the look-out for paragraphs for his newspaper. At the same time, however, although the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception disappeared in this fashion, it could be divined that they were behind the vast stage, like a

hidden sovereign power, coining money and toiling without a pause to increase the triumphant prosperity of their business. Indeed, they turned even their humility to account.

"It 's true that we have had to get up early—two in the morning," resumed Father Fourcade gaily. "But I wished to be here. What would my poor children have said, indeed, if I had not come?"

He was alluding to the sick pilgrims, those who were so much flesh for miracle-working; and it was a fact that he had never missed coming to the station, no matter what the hour, to meet that woeful white train, that train which brought such grievous suffering with it.

"Five-and-twenty minutes past three—only another five minutes now," exclaimed Dr. Bonamy repressing a yawn as he glanced at the clock; for, despite his obsequious air, he was at bottom very much annoyed at having had to get out of bed so early. However, he continued his slow promenade with Father Fourcade along that platform which resembled a covered walk, pacing up and down in the dense night which the gas jets here and there illumined with patches of yellow light. Little parties, dimly outlined, composed of priests and gentlemen in frock-coats, with a solitary officer of dragoons, went to and fro incessantly, talking together the while in discreet murmuring tones. Other people, seated on benches, ranged along the station wall, were also chatting or putting their patience to proof with their glances wandering away into the black stretch of country before them. The doorways of

the offices and waiting-rooms, which were brilliantly lighted, looked like great holes in the darkness, and all was flaring in the refreshment-room, where you could see the marble tables and the counter laden with bottles and glasses and baskets of bread and fruit.

On the right hand, beyond the roofing of the platform, there was a confused swarming of people. There was here a goods gate, by which the sick were taken out of the station, and a mass of stretchers, litters, and hand-carts, with piles of pillows and mattresses, obstructed the broad walk. Three parties of bearers were also assembled here, persons of well-nigh every class, but more particularly young men of good society, all wearing red, orange-tipped crosses and straps of yellow leather. Many of them, too, had adopted the Bearnese cap, the convenient head-gear of the region ; and a few, clad as though they were bound on some distant expedition, displayed wonderful gaiters reaching to their knees. Some were smoking, whilst others, installed in their little vehicles, slept or read newspapers by the light of the neighbouring gas jets. One group, standing apart, were discussing some service question.

Suddenly, however, one and all began to salute. A paternal-looking man, with a heavy but good-natured face, lighted by large blue eyes, like those of a credulous child, was approaching. It was Baron Suire, the President of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation. He possessed a great fortune and occupied a high position at Toulouse.

" Where is Berthaud ? " he inquired of one bearer

after another, with a busy air. "Where is Berthaud? I must speak to him."

The others answered, volunteering contradictory information. Berthaud was their superintendent, and whilst some said that they had seen him with the Reverend Father Fourcade, others affirmed that he must be in the courtyard of the station inspecting the ambulance vehicles. And they thereupon offered to go and fetch him.

"No, no, thank you," replied the Baron. "I shall manage to find him myself."

Whilst this was happening, Berthaud, who had just seated himself on a bench at the other end of the station, was talking with his young friend, Gérard de Peyrelongue, by way of occupation pending the arrival of the train. The superintendent of the bearers was a man of forty, with a broad, regular-featured, handsome face and carefully trimmed whiskers of a lawyer-like pattern. Belonging to a militant Legitimist family and holding extremely reactionary opinions, he had been Procureur de la République (public prosecutor) in a town of the south of France from the time of the parliamentary revolution of the twenty-fourth of May[1] until that of the decree of the Religious Communities,[2] when he had resigned his post in a blusterous fashion, by addressing an insult-

[1] The parliamentary revolution of May, 1873, by which M. Thiers was overthrown and Marshal MacMahon installed in his place with the object of restoring the Monarchy in France.—*Trans.*

[2] M. Grévy's decree by which the Jesuits were expelled.—*Trans.*

tter to the Minister of Justice. And he had r since laid down his arms, but had joined the spitality of Our Lady of Salvation as a sort of protest, repairing year after year to Lourdes in order to "demonstrate"; convinced as he was that the pilgrimages were both disagreeable and hurtful to the Republic, and that God alone could re-establish the Monarchy by one of those miracles which He worked so lavishly at the Grotto. Despite all this, however, Berthaud possessed no small amount of good sense, and being of a gay disposition, displayed a kind of jovial charity towards the poor sufferers whose transport he had to provide for during the three days that the national pilgrimage remained at Lourdes.

"And so, my dear Gérard," he said to the young man seated beside him, "your marriage is really to come off this year?"

"Why yes, if I can find such a wife as I want," replied the other. "Come, cousin, give me some good advice."

Gérard de Peyrelongue, a short, thin, carroty young man, with a pronounced nose and prominent cheek-bones, belonged to Tarbes, where his father and mother had lately died, leaving him at the utmost some seven or eight thousand francs a year. Extremely ambitious, he had been unable to find such a wife as he desired in his native province—a well-connected young woman capable of helping him to push both forward and upward in the world; and so he had joined the Hospitality, and betook himself every summer to Lourdes, in the vague hope that amidst the mass of believers, the torrent of de-

vout mammas and daughters which flowed thither, he might find the family whose help he needed to enable him to make his way in this terrestrial sphere. However, he remained in perplexity, for if, on the one hand, he already had several young ladies in view, on the other, none of them completely satisfied him.

"Eh, cousin? You will advise me, won't you?" he said to Berthaud. "You are a man of experience. There is Mademoiselle Lemercier who comes here with her aunt. She is very rich; according to what is said she has over a million francs. But she does n't belong to our set, and besides I think her a bit of a madcap."

Berthaud nodded. "I told you so; if I were you I should choose little Raymonde, Mademoiselle de Jonquière."

"But she has n't a copper!"

"That 's true—she has barely enough to pay for her board. But she is fairly good-looking, she has been well brought up, and she has no extravagant tastes. That is the really important point, for what is the use of marrying a rich girl if she squanders the dowry she brings you? Besides, I know Madame and Mademoiselle de Jonquière very well, I meet them all through the winter in the most influential drawing-rooms of Paris. And, finally, don't forget the girl's uncle, the diplomatist, who has had the painful courage to remain in the service of the Republic. He will be able to do whatever he pleases for his niece's husband."

For a moment Gérard seemed shaken, and then

he relapsed into perplexity. "But she has n't a copper," he said, "no, not a copper. It 's too stiff. I. am quite willing to think it over, but it really frightens me too much."

This time Berthaud burst into a frank laugh. "Come, you are ambitious, so you must be daring. I tell you that it means the secretaryship of an embassy before two years are over. By the way, Madame and Mademoiselle de Jonquière are in the white train which we are waiting for. Make up your mind and pay your court at once."

"No, no! Later on. I want to think it over."

At this moment they were interrupted, for Baron Suire, who had already once gone by without perceiving them, so completely did the darkness enshroud them in that retired corner, had just recognised the ex-public prosecutor's good-natured laugh. And, thereupon, with the volubility of a man whose head is easily unhinged, he gave him several orders respecting the vehicles and the transport service, deploring the circumstance that it would be impossible to conduct the patients to the Grotto immediately on their arrival, as it was yet so extremely early. It had therefore been decided that they should in the first instance be taken to the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours, where they would be able to rest awhile after their trying journey.

Whilst the Baron and the superintendent were thus settling what measures should be adopted, Gérard shook hands with a priest who had sat down beside him. This was the Abbé des Hermoises, who was barely eight-and-thirty years of age and had a

superb head—such a head as one might expect to find on the shoulders of a worldly priest. With his hair well combed, and his person perfumed, he was not unnaturally a great favourite among women. Very amiable and distinguished in his manners, he did not come to Lourdes in any official capacity, but simply for his pleasure, as so many other people did; and the bright, sparkling smile of a sceptic above all idolatry gleamed in the depths of his fine eyes. He certainly believed, and bowed to superior decisions; but the Church—the Holy See—had not pronounced itself with regard to the miracles; and he seemed quite ready to dispute their authenticity. Having lived at Tarbes he was already acquainted with Gérard.

"Ah!" he said to him, "how impressive it is—is n't it?—this waiting for the trains in the middle of the night! I have come to meet a lady—one of my former Paris penitents—but I don't know what train she will come by. Still, as you see, I stop on, for it all interests me so much."

Then another priest, an old country priest, having come to sit down on the same bench, the Abbé considerately began talking to him, speaking of the beauty of the Lourdes district and of the theatrical effect which would take place by-and-by when the sun rose and the mountains appeared.

However, there was again a sudden alert, and the station-master ran along shouting orders. Removing his hand from Dr. Bonamy's shoulder, Father Fourcade, despite his gouty leg, hastily drew near.

"Oh! it 's that Bayonne express which is so late,"

answered the station-master in reply to the questions addressed to him. "I should like some information about it; I 'm not at ease."

At this moment the telegraph bells rang out and a porter rushed away into the darkness swinging a lantern, whilst a distant signal began to work. Thereupon the station-master resumed: "Ah! this time it 's the white train. Let us hope we shall have time to get the sick people out before the express passes."

He started off once more and disappeared. Berthaud meanwhile called to Gérard, who was at the head of a squad of bearers, and they both made haste to join their men, into whom Baron Suire was already instilling activity. The bearers flocked to the spot from all sides, and setting themselves in motion began dragging their little vehicles across the lines to the platform at which the white train would come in—an unroofed platform plunged in darkness. A mass of pillows, mattresses, stretchers, and litters was soon waiting there, whilst Father Fourcade, Dr. Bonamy, the priests, the gentlemen, and the officer of dragoons in their turn crossed over in order to witness the removal of the ailing pilgrims. All that they could as yet see, far away in the depths of the black country, was the lantern in front of the engine, looking like a red star which grew larger and larger. Strident whistles pierced the night, then suddenly ceased, and you only heard the panting of the steam and the dull roar of the wheels gradually slackening their speed. Then the canticle became distinctly audible, the song of Bernadette with the ever-recur-

ring "Aves" of its refrain, which the whole train was chanting in chorus. And at last this train of suffering and faith, this moaning, singing train, thus making its entry into Lourdes, drew up in the station.

The carriage doors were at once opened, the whole throng of healthy pilgrims, and of ailing ones able to walk, alighted, and streamed over the platform. The few gas lamps cast but a feeble light on the crowd of poverty-stricken beings clad in faded garments, and encumbered with all sorts of parcels, baskets, valises, and boxes. And amidst all the jostling of this scared flock, which did not know in which direction to turn to find its way out of the station, loud exclamations were heard, the shouts of people calling relatives whom they had lost, mingled with the embraces of others whom relatives or friends had come to meet. One woman declared with beatifical satisfaction, "I have slept well." A priest went off carrying his travelling-bag, after wishing a crippled lady "good luck!" Most of them had the bewildered, weary, yet joyous appearance of people whom an excursion train sets down at some unknown station. And such became the scramble and the confusion in the darkness, that they did not hear the railway employés who grew quite hoarse through shouting, "This way! this way!" in their eagerness to clear the platform as soon as possible.

Sister Hyacinthe had nimbly alighted from her compartment, leaving the dead man in the charge of Sister Claire des Anges; and, losing her head somewhat, she ran off to the cantine van in the idea that Ferrand would be able to help her. Fortunately

she found Father Fourcade in front of the van and acquainted him with the fatality in a low voice. Repressing a gesture of annoyance, he thereupon called Baron Suire, who was passing, and began whispering in his ear. The muttering lasted for a few seconds, and then the Baron rushed off, and clove his way through the crowd with two bearers carrying a covered litter. In this the man was removed from the carriage as though he were a patient who had simply fainted, the mob of pilgrims paying no further attention to him amidst all the emotion of their arrival. Preceded by the Baron, the bearers carried the corpse into a goods office, where they provisionally lodged it behind some barrels; one of them, a fair-haired little fellow, a general's son, remaining to watch over it.

Meanwhile, after begging Ferrand and Sister Saint-François to go and wait for her in the courtyard of the station, near the reserved vehicle which was to take them to the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours, Sister Hyacinthe returned to the railway carriage and talked of helping her patients to alight before going away. But Marie would not let her touch her. "No, no!" said the girl, "do not trouble about me, Sister. I shall remain here the last. My father and Abbé Froment have gone to the van to fetch the wheels; I am waiting for their return; they know how to fix them, and they will take me away all right, you may be sure of it."

In the same way M. Sabathier and Brother Isidore did not desire to be moved until the crowd had decreased. Madame de Jonquière, who had taken

charge of La Grivotte, also promised to see to Madame Vêtu's removal in an ambulance vehicle. And thereupon Sister Hyacinthe decided that she would go off at once so as to get everything ready at the hospital. Moreover, she took with her both little Sophie Couteau and Élise Rouquet, whose face she very carefully wrapped up. Madame Maze preceded them, while Madame Vincent, carrying her little girl, who was unconscious and quite white, struggled through the crowd, possessed by the fixed idea of running off as soon as possible and depositing the child in the Grotto at the feet of the Blessed Virgin.

The mob was now pressing towards the doorway by which passengers left the station, and to facilitate the egress of all these people it at last became necessary to open the luggage gates. The employés, at a loss how to take the tickets, held out their caps, which a downpour of the little cards speedily filled. And in the courtyard, a large square courtyard, skirted on three sides by the low buildings of the station, the most extraordinary uproar prevailed amongst all the vehicles of divers kinds which were there jumbled together. The hotel omnibuses, backed against the curb of the footway, displayed the most sacred names on their large boards—Jesus and Mary, St. Michel, the Rosary, and the Sacred Heart. Then there were ambulance vehicles, landaus, cabriolets, brakes, and little donkey carts, all entangled together, with their drivers shouting, swearing, and cracking their whips—the tumult being apparently increased by the obscurity in which the lanterns set brilliant patches of light.

Rain had fallen heavily a few hours previously. Liquid mud splashed up under the hoofs of the horses; the foot passengers sank into it to their ankles. M. Vigneron, whom Madame Vigneron and Madame Chaise were following in a state of distraction, raised Gustave, in order to place him in the omnibus from the Hotel of the Apparitions, after which he himself and the ladies climbed into the vehicle. Madame Maze, shuddering slightly, like a delicate tabby who fears to dirty the tips of her paws, made a sign to the driver of an old brougham, got into it, and quickly drove away, after giving as address the Convent of the Blue Sisters. And at last Sister Hyacinthe was able to install herself with Elise Rouquet and Sophie Couteau in a large *char-à-bancs*, in which Ferrand and Sisters Saint-François and Claire des Anges were already seated. The drivers whipped up their spirited little horses, and the vehicles went off at a breakneck pace, amidst the shouts of those left behind, and the splashing of the mire.

In presence of that rushing torrent, Madame Vincent, with her dear little burden in her arms, hesitated to cross over. Bursts of laughter rang out around her every now and then. Oh! what a filthy mess! And at sight of all the mud, the women caught up their skirts before attempting to pass through it. At last, when the courtyard had somewhat emptied, Madame Vincent herself ventured on her way, all terror lest the mire should make her fall in that black darkness. Then, on reaching a downhill road, she noticed there a number of women of

the locality who were on the watch, offering furnished rooms, bed and board, according to the state of the pilgrim's purse.

"Which is the way to the Grotto, madame, if you please?" asked Madame Vincent, addressing one old woman of the party.

Instead of answering the question, however, the other offered her a cheap room. "You won't find anything in the hotels," said she, "for they are all full. Perhaps you will be able to eat there, but you certainly won't find a closet even to sleep in."

Eat, sleep, indeed! Had Madame Vincent any thought of such things; she who had left Paris with thirty sous in her pocket, all that remained to her after the expenses she had been put to!

"The way to the Grotto, if you please, madame?" she repeated.

Among the women who were thus touting for lodgers, there was a tall, well-built girl, dressed like a superior servant, and looking very clean, with carefully tended hands. She glanced at Madame Vincent and slightly shrugged her shoulders. And then, seeing a broad-chested priest with a red face go by, she rushed after him, offered him a furnished room, and continued following him, whispering in his ear.

Another girl, however, at last took pity on Madame Vincent and said to her: "Here, go down this road, and when you get to the bottom, turn to the right and you will reach the Grotto."

Meanwhile, the confusion inside the station continued. The healthy pilgrims, and those of the sick who retained the use of their legs could go off, thus,

in some measure, clearing the platform; but the others, the more grievously stricken sufferers whom it was difficult to get out of the carriages and remove to the hospital, remained waiting. The bearers seemed to become quite bewildered, rushing madly hither and thither with their litters and vehicles, not knowing at what end to set about the profusion of work which lay before them.

As Berthaud, followed by Gérard, went along the platform, gesticulating, he noticed two ladies and a girl who were standing under a gas jet and to all appearance waiting. In the girl he recognised Raymonde, and with a sign of the hand he at once stopped his companion. "Ah! mademoiselle," said he, "how pleased I am to see you! Is Madame de Jonquière quite well? You have made a good journey, I hope?" Then, without a pause, he added: "This is my friend, Monsieur Gérard de Peyrelongue."

Raymonde gazed fixedly at the young man with her clear, smiling eyes. "Oh! I already have the pleasure of being slightly acquainted with this gentleman," she said. "We have previously met one another at Lourdes."

Thereupon Gérard, who thought that his cousin Berthaud was conducting matters too quickly, and was quite resolved that he would not enter into any hasty engagement, contented himself with bowing in a ceremonious way.

"We are waiting for mamma," resumed Raymonde. "She is extremely busy; she has to see after some pilgrims who are very ill."

At this, little Madame Désagneaux, with her pretty, light wavy-haired head, began to say that it served Madame de Jonquière right for refusing her services. She herself was stamping with impatience, eager to join in the work and make herself useful, whilst Madame Volmar, silent, shrinking back as though taking no interest in it at all, seemed simply desirous of penetrating the darkness, as though, indeed, she were seeking somebody with those magnificent eyes of hers, usually bedimmed, but now shining out like brasiers.

Just then, however, they were all pushed back. Madame Dieulafay was being removed from her first-class compartment, and Madame Désagneaux could not restrain an exclamation of pity. "Ah! the poor woman!"

There could in fact be no more distressing sight than this young woman, encompassed by luxury, covered with lace in her species of coffin, so wasted that she seemed to be a mere human shred, deposited on that platform till it could be taken away. Her husband and her sister, both very elegant and very sad, remained standing near her, whilst a man-servant and maid ran off with the valises to ascertain if the carriage which had been ordered by telegram was in the courtyard. Abbé Judaine also helped the sufferer; and when two men at last took her up he bent over her and wished her *au revoir*, adding some kind words which she did not seem to hear. Then as he watched her removal, he resumed, addressing himself to Berthaud, whom he knew: "Ah! the poor people, if they could only purchase their dear

sufferer's cure. I told them that prayer was the most precious thing in the Blessed Virgin's eyes, and I hope that I have myself prayed fervently enough to obtain the compassion of Heaven. Nevertheless, they have brought a magnificent gift, a golden lantern for the Basilica, a perfect marvel, adorned with precious stones. May the Immaculate Virgin deign to smile upon it!"

In this way a great many offerings were brought by the pilgrims. Some huge bouquets of flowers had just gone by, together with a kind of triple crown of roses, mounted on a wooden stand. And the old priest explained that before leaving the station he wished to secure a banner, the gift of the beautiful Madame Jousseur, Madame Dieulafay's sister.

Madame de Jonquière was at last approaching, however, and on perceiving Berthaud and Gérard she exclaimed: "Pray do go to that carriage, gentlemen—that one, there! We want some men very badly. There are three or four sick persons to be taken out. I am in despair; I can do nothing myself."

Gérard ran off after bowing to Raymonde, whilst Berthaud advised Madame de Jonquière to leave the station with her daughter and those ladies instead of remaining on the platform. Her presence was in nowise necessary, he said; he would undertake everything, and within three quarters of an hour she would find her patients in her ward at the hospital. She ended by giving way, and took a conveyance in company with Raymonde and Madame Désagneaux. As for Madame Volmar, she had at the last moment

disappeared, as though seized with a sudden fit of impatience. The others fancied that they had seen her approach a strange gentleman, with the object no doubt of making some inquiry of him. However, they would of course find her at the hospital.

Berthaud joined Gérard again just as the young man, assisted by two fellow-bearers, was endeavouring to remove M. Sabathier from the carriage. It was a difficult task, for he was very stout and very heavy, and they began to think that he would never pass through the doorway of the compartment. However, as he had been got in they ought to be able to get him out; and indeed when two other bearers had entered the carriage from the other side, they were at last able to deposit him on the platform.

The dawn was now appearing, a faint pale dawn; and the platform presented the woeful appearance of an improvised hospital. La Grivotte, who had lost consciousness, lay there on a mattress pending her removal in a litter; whilst Madame Vêtu had been seated against a lamp-post, suffering so severely from another attack of her ailment that they scarcely dared to touch her. Some hospitallers, whose hands were gloved, were with difficulty wheeling their little vehicles in which were poor, sordid-looking women with old baskets at their feet. Others, with stretchers on which lay the stiffened, woeful bodies of silent sufferers, whose eyes gleamed with anguish, found themselves unable to pass; but some of the infirm pilgrims, some unfortunate cripples, contrived to slip through the ranks, among them a young priest who was lame, and a little humpbacked boy, one of whose

legs had been amputated, and who, looking like a gnome, managed to drag himself with his crutches from group to group. Then there was quite a block around a man who was bent in half, twisted by paralysis to such a point that he had to be carried on a chair with his head and feet hanging downward. It seemed as though hours would be required to clear the platform.

The dismay therefore reached a climax when the station-master suddenly rushed up shouting : " The Bayonne express is signalled. Make haste ! make haste ! You have only three minutes left ! "

Father Fourcade, who had remained in the midst of the throng, leaning on Doctor Bonamy's arm, and gaily encouraging the more stricken of the sufferers, beckoned to Berthaud and said to him : " Finish taking them out of the train ; you will be able to clear the platform afterwards ! "

The advice was very sensible, and in accordance with it they finished placing the sufferers on the platform. In Madame de Jonquiére's carriage Marie now alone remained, waiting patiently. M. de Guersaint and Pierre had at last returned to her, bringing the two pairs of wheels by means of which the box in which she lay was rolled about. And with Gérard's assistance Pierre in all haste removed the girl from the train. She was as light as a poor shivering bird, and it was only the box that gave them any trouble. However, they soon placed it on the wheels and made the latter fast, and then Pierre might have rolled Marie away had it not been for the crowd which hampered him.

"Make haste! make haste!" furiously repeated the station-master.

He himself lent a hand, taking hold of a sick man by the feet in order to remove him from the compartment more speedily. And he also pushed the little hand-carts back, so as to clear the edge of the platform. In a second-class carriage, however, there still remained one woman who had just been overpowered by a terrible nervous attack. She was howling and struggling, and it was impossible to think of touching her at that moment. But on the other hand the express, signalled by the incessant tinkling of the electric bells, was now fast approaching, and they had to close the door and in all haste shunt the train to the siding where it would remain for three days, until in fact it was required to convey its load of sick and healthy passengers back to Paris. As it went off to the siding the crowd still heard the cries of the suffering woman, whom it had been necessary to leave in it, in charge of a Sister, cries which grew weaker and weaker, like those of a strengthless child whom one at last succeeds in consoling.

"Good Lord!" muttered the station-master; "it was high time!"

In fact the Bayonne express was now coming along at full speed, and the next moment it rushed like a crash of thunder past that woeful platform littered with all the grievous wretchedness of a hospital hastily evacuated. The litters and little hand-carts were shaken, but there was no accident, for the porters were on the watch, and pushed back the bewildered flock which was still jostling and struggling

in its eagerness to get away. As soon as the express had passed, however, circulation was re-established, and the bearers were at last able to complete the removal of the sick with prudent deliberation.

Little by little the daylight was increasing—a clear dawn it was, whitening the heavens whose reflection illumined the earth, which was still black. One began to distinguish things and people clearly.

"Oh, by-and-by!" Marie repeated to Pierre, as he endeavoured to roll her away. "Let us wait till some part of the crowd has gone."

Then, looking around, she began to feel interested in a man of military bearing, apparently some sixty years of age, who was walking about among the sick pilgrims. With a square-shaped head and white bushy hair, he would still have looked sturdy if he had not dragged his left foot, throwing it inward at each step he took. With the left hand, too, he leant heavily on a thick walking-stick. When M. Sabathier, who had visited Lourdes for six years past, perceived him, he became quite gay. "Ah!" said he, "it is you, Commander!"

Commander was perhaps the old man's name. But as he was decorated with a broad red riband, he was possibly called Commander on account of his decoration, albeit the latter was that of a mere chevalier. Nobody exactly knew his story. No doubt he had relatives and children of his own somewhere, but these matters remained vague and mysterious. For the last three years he had been employed at the railway station as a superintendent in the goods department, a simple occupation, a little berth which

had been given him by favour and which enabled him to live in perfect happiness. A first stroke of apoplexy at fifty-five years of age had been followed by a second one three years later, which had left him slightly paralysed in the left side. And now he was awaiting the third stroke with an air of perfect tranquillity. As he himself put it, he was at the disposal of death, which might come for him that night, the next day, or possibly that very moment. All Lourdes knew him on account of the habit, the mania he had, at pilgrimage time, of coming to witness the arrival of the trains, dragging his foot along and leaning upon his stick, whilst expressing his astonishment and reproaching the ailing ones for their intense desire to be made whole and sound again.

This was the third year that he had seen M. Sabathier arrive, and all his anger fell upon him. "What! you have come back *again!*" he exclaimed. "Well, you *must* be desirous of living this hateful life! But *sacrebleu!* go and die quietly in your bed at home. Is n't that the best thing that can happen to anyone?"

M. Sabathier evinced no anger, but laughed, exhausted though he was by the handling to which he had been subjected during his removal from the carriage. "No, no," said he, "I prefer to be cured."

"To be cured, to be cured! That 's what they all ask for. They travel hundreds of leagues and arrive in fragments, howling with pain, and all this to be cured—to go through every worry and every suffering again. Come, monsieur, you would be

nicely caught if, at your age and with your dilapidated old body, your Blessed Virgin should be pleased to restore the use of your legs to you. What would you do with them, *mon Dieu?* What pleasure would you find in prolonging the abomination of old age for a few years more? It 's much better to die at once, while you are like that! Death is happiness!"

He spoke in this fashion, not as a believer who aspires to the delicious reward of eternal life, but as a weary man who expects to fall into nihility, to enjoy the great everlasting peace of being no more.

Whilst M. Sabathier was gaily shrugging his shoulders as though he had a child to deal with, Abbé Judaine, who had at last secured his banner, came by and stopped for a moment in order that he might gently scold the Commander, with whom he also was well acquainted.

"Don't blaspheme, my dear friend," he said. "It is an offence against God to refuse life and to treat health with contempt. If you yourself had listened to me, you would have asked the Blessed Virgin to cure your leg before now."

At this the Commander became angry. "My leg! The Virgin can do nothing to it! I 'm quite at my ease. May death come and may it all be over forever! When the time comes to die you turn your face to the wall and you die—it 's simple enough."

The old priest interrupted him, however. Pointing to Marie, who was lying on her box listening to them, he exclaimed: "You tell all our sick to go

home and die—even mademoiselle, eh? She who is full of youth and wishes to live."

Marie's eyes were wide open, burning with the ardent desire which she felt to *be*, to enjoy her share of the vast world; and the Commander, who had drawn near, gazed upon her, suddenly seized with deep emotion which made his voice tremble. "If mademoiselle gets well," he said, "I will wish her another miracle, that she be happy."

Then he went off, dragging his foot and tapping the flag-stones with the ferrule of his stout stick as he continued wending his way, like an angry philosopher among the suffering pilgrims.

Little by little, the platform was at last cleared. Madame Vêtu and La Grivotte were carried away, and Gérard removed M. Sabathier in a little cart, whilst Baron Suire and Berthaud already began giving orders for the green train, which would be the next one to arrive. Of all the ailing pilgrims the only one now remaining at the station was Marie, of whom Pierre jealously took charge. He had already dragged her into the courtyard when he noticed that M. de Guersaint had disappeared; but a moment later he perceived him conversing with the Abbé des Hermoises, whose acquaintance he had just made. Their admiration of the beauties of nature had brought them together. The daylight had now appeared, and the surrounding mountains displayed themselves in all their majesty.

"What a lovely country, monsieur!" exclaimed M. de Guersaint. "I have been wishing to see the Cirque de Gavarnie for thirty years past. But it is

some distance away and the trip must be an expensive one, so that I fear I shall not be able to make it."

"You are mistaken, monsieur," said the Abbé; "nothing is more easily managed. By making up a party the expense becomes very slight. And as it happens, I wish to return there this year, so that if you would like to join us——"

"Oh, certainly, monsieur. We will speak of it again. A thousand thanks," replied M. de Guersaint.

His daughter was now calling him, however, and he joined her after taking leave of the Abbé in a very cordial manner. Pierre had decided that he would drag Marie to the hospital so as to spare her the pain of transference to another vehicle. But as the omnibuses, landaus, and other conveyances were already coming back, again filling the courtyard in readiness for the arrival of the next train, the young priest had some difficulty in reaching the road with the little chariot whose low wheels sank deeply in the mud. Some police agents charged with maintaining order were cursing that fearful mire which splashed their boots; and indeed it was only the touts, the young and old women who had rooms to let, who laughed at the puddles, which they crossed and crossed again in every direction, pursuing the last pilgrims that emerged from the station.

When the little car had begun to roll more easily over the sloping road Marie suddenly inquired of M. de Guersaint, who was walking near her: "What day of the week is it, father?"

"Saturday, my darling."

"Ah! yes, Saturday, the day of the Blessed Virgin. Is it to-day that she will cure me?"

Then she began thinking again; while, at some distance behind her, two bearers came furtively down the road, with a covered stretcher in which lay the corpse of the man who had died in the train. They had gone to take it from behind the barrels in the goods office, and were now conveying it to a secret spot of which Father Fourcade had told them.

II

HOSPITAL AND GROTTO

BUILT, so far as it extends, by a charitable Canon, and left unfinished through lack of money, the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours is a vast pile, four storeys high, and consequently far too lofty, since it is difficult to carry the sufferers to the topmost wards. As a rule the building is occupied by a hundred infirm and aged paupers; but at the season of the national pilgrimage these old folks are for three days sheltered elsewhere, and the hospital is let to the Fathers of the Assumption, who at times lodge in it as many as five and six hundred patients. Still, however closely packed they may be, the accommodation never suffices, so that the three or four hundred remaining sufferers have to be distributed between the Hospital of Salvation and the town hospital, the men being sent to the former and the women to the latter institution.

That morning at sunrise great confusion prevailed in the sand-covered courtyard of Our Lady of Dolours, at the door of which a couple of priests were mounting guard. The temporary staff, with its formidable supply of registers, cards, and printed

formulas, had installed itself in one of the ground-floor rooms on the previous day. The managers were desirous of greatly improving upon the organisation of the preceding year. The lower wards were this time to be reserved to the most helpless sufferers; and in order to prevent a repetition of the cases of mistaken identity which had occurred in the past, very great care was to be taken in filling in and distributing the admission cards, each of which bore the name of a ward and the number of a bed. It became difficult, however, to act in accordance with these good intentions in presence of the torrent of ailing beings which the white train had brought to Lourdes, and the new formalities so complicated matters that the patients had to be deposited in the courtyard as they arrived, to wait there until it became possible to admit them in something like an orderly manner. It was the scene witnessed at the railway station all over again, the same woeful camping in the open, whilst the bearers and the young seminarists who acted as the secretary's assistants ran hither and thither in bewilderment.

"We have been over-ambitious, we wanted to do things too well!" exclaimed Baron Suire in despair.

There was much truth in his remark, for never had a greater number of useless precautions been taken, and they now discovered that, by some inexplicable error, they had allotted not the lower- but the higher-placed wards to the patients whom it was most difficult to move. It was impossible to begin the classification afresh, however, and so as in former

years things must be allowed to take their course, in a haphazard way. The distribution of the cards began, a young priest at the same time entering each patient's name and address in a register. Moreover, all the *hospitalisation* cards bearing the patients' names and numbers had to be produced, so that the names of the wards and the numbers of the beds might be added to them ; and all these formalities greatly protracted the *défilé*.

Then there was an endless coming and going from the top to the bottom of the building, and from one to the other end of each of its four floors. M. Sabathier was one of the first to secure admittance, being placed in a ground-floor room which was known as the Family Ward. Sick men were there allowed to have their wives with them ; but to the other wards of the hospital only women were admitted. Brother Isidore, it is true, was accompanied by his sister ; however, by a special favour it was agreed that they should be considered as conjoints, and the missionary was accordingly placed in the bed next to that allotted to M. Sabathier. The chapel, still littered with plaster and with its unfinished windows boarded up, was close at hand. There were also various wards in an unfinished state ; still these were filled with mattresses, on which sufferers were rapidly placed. All those who could walk, however, were already besieging the refectory, a long gallery whose broad windows looked into an inner courtyard ; and the Saint-Frai Sisters, who managed the hospital at other times, and had remained to attend to the cooking, began to distribute bowls of coffee and chocolate

among the poor women whom the terrible journey had exhausted.

"Rest yourselves and try to gain a little strength," repeated Baron Suire, who was ever on the move, showing himself here, there, and everywhere in rapid succession. "You have three good hours before you, it is not yet five, and their reverences have given orders that you are not to be taken to the Grotto until eight o'clock, so as to avoid any excessive fatigue.

Meanwhile, up above on the second floor, Madame de Jonquière had been one of the first to take possession of the Sainte-Honorine Ward of which she was the superintendent. She had been obliged to leave her daughter Raymonde downstairs, for the regulations did not allow young girls to enter the wards, where they might have witnessed sights that were scarcely proper or else too horrible for such eyes as theirs. Raymonde had therefore remained in the refectory as a helper; however, little Madame Désagneaux, being a lady-hospitaller, had not left the superintendent, and was already asking her for orders, in her delight that she should at last be able to render some assistance.

"Are all these beds properly made, madame?" she inquired; "perhaps I had better make them afresh with Sister Hyacinthe."

The ward, whose walls were painted a light yellow, and whose few windows admitted but little light from an inner yard, contained fifteen beds, standing in two rows against the walls.

"We will see by-and-by," replied Madame de Jon-

quière with an absorbed air. She was busy counting the beds and examining the long narrow apartment. And this accomplished she added in an undertone: "I shall never have room enough. They say that I must accommodate twenty-three patients. We shall have to put some mattresses down."

Sister Hyacinthe, who had followed the ladies after leaving Sister Saint-François and Sister Claire des Anges in a small adjoining apartment which was being transformed into a linen room, then began to lift up the coverlets and examine the bedding. And she promptly reassured Madame Désagneaux with regard to her surmises. "Oh! the beds are properly made," she said; "everything is very clean too. One can see that the Saint-Frai Sisters have attended to things themselves. The reserve mattresses are in the next room, however, and if madame will lend me a hand we can place some of them between the beds at once.

"Oh, certainly!" exclaimed young Madame Désagneaux, quite excited by the idea of carrying mattresses about with her weak slender arms.

It became necessary for Madame de Jonquière to calm her. "By-and-by," said the lady-superintendent; "there is no hurry. Let us wait till our patients arrive. I don't much like this ward, it is so difficult to air. Last year I had the Sainte-Rosalie Ward on the first floor. However, we will organise matters, all the same."

Some other lady-hospitallers were now arriving, quite a hiveful of busy bees, all eager to start on their work. The confusion which so often arose

was, in fact, increased by the excessive number of nurses, women of the aristocracy and upper-middle class, with whose fervent zeal some little vanity was blended. There were more than two hundred of them, and as each had to make a donation on joining the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation, the managers did not dare to refuse any applicants, for fear lest they might check the flow of alms-giving. Thus the number of lady-hospitallers increased year by year. Fortunately there were among them some who cared for nothing beyond the privilege of wearing the red cloth cross, and who started off on excursions as soon as they reached Lourdes. Still it must be acknowledged that those who devoted themselves were really deserving, for they underwent five days of awful fatigue, sleeping scarcely a couple of hours each night, and living in the midst of the most terrible and repulsive spectacles. They witnessed the death agonies, dressed the pestilential sores, cleaned up, changed linen, turned the sufferers over in their beds, went through a sickening and overwhelming labour to which they were in no wise accustomed. And thus they emerged from it aching all over, tired to death, with feverish eyes flaming with the joy of the charity which so excited them.

"And Madame Volmar?" suddenly asked Madame Désagneaux. "I thought we should find her here."

This was apparently a subject which Madame de Jonquière did not care to have discussed; for, as though she were aware of the truth and wished to bury it in silence, with the indulgence of a woman

who compassionates human wretchedness, she promptly retorted: "Madame Volmar is n't strong, she must have gone to the hotel to rest. We must let her sleep."

Then she apportioned the beds among the ladies present, allotting two to each of them; and this done they all finished taking possession of the place, hastening up and down and backwards and forwards in order to ascertain where the offices, the linen-room, and the kitchens were situated.

"And the dispensary?" then asked one of the ladies.

But there was no dispensary. There was no medical staff even. What would have been the use of any?—since the patients were those whom science had given up, despairing creatures who had come to beg of God the cure which powerless men were unable to promise them. Logically enough, all treatment was suspended during the pilgrimage. If a patient seemed likely to die, extreme unction was administered. The only medical man about the place was the young doctor who had come by the white train with his little medicine chest; and his intervention was limited to an endeavour to assuage the sufferings of those patients who chanced to ask for him during an attack.

As it happened, Sister Hyacinthe was just bringing Ferrand, whom Sister Saint-François had kept with her in a closet near the linen-room which he proposed to make his quarters. "Madame," said he to Madame de Jonquière, "I am entirely at your disposal. In case of need you will only have to ring for me."

She barely listened to him, however, engaged as she was in a quarrel with a young priest belonging to the management with reference to a deficiency of certain utensils. "Certainly, monsieur, if we should need a soothing draught," she answered, and then, reverting to her discussion, she went on: "Well, Monsieur l'Abbé, you must certainly get me four or five more. How can we possibly manage with so few? Things are bad enough as it is."

Ferrand looked and listened, quite bewildered by the extraordinary behaviour of the people amongst whom he had been thrown by chance since the previous day. He who did not believe, who was only present out of friendship and charity, was amazed at this extraordinary scramble of wretchedness and suffering rushing towards the hope of happiness. And, as a medical man of the new school, he was altogether upset by the careless neglect of precautions, the contempt which was shown for the most simple teachings of science, in the certainty which was apparently felt that, if Heaven should so will it, cure would supervene, sudden and resounding, like a lie given to the very laws of nature. But if this were the case, what was the use of that last concession to human prejudices—why engage a doctor for the journey if none were wanted? At this thought the young man returned to his little room, experiencing a vague feeling of shame as he realised that his presence was useless, and even a trifle ridiculous.

"Get some opium pills ready all the same," said Sister Hyacinthe, as she went back with him as far

as the linen-room. "You will be asked for some, for I feel anxious about some of the patients."

While speaking she looked at him with her large blue eyes, so gentle and so kind, and ever lighted by a divine smile. The constant exercise which she gave herself brought the rosy flush of her quick blood to her skin all dazzling with youthfulness. And like a good friend who was willing that he should share the work to which she gave her heart, she added: "Besides, if I should need somebody to get a patient in or out of bed, you will help me, won't you?"

Thereupon, at the idea that he might be of use to her, he was pleased that he had come and was there. In his mind's eye, he again beheld her at his bedside, at the time when he had so narrowly escaped death, nursing him with fraternal hands, with the smiling, compassionate grace of a sexless angel, in whom there was something more than a comrade, something of a woman left. However, the thought never occurred to him that there was religion, belief, behind her.

"Oh! I will help you as much as you like, Sister," he replied. "I belong to you, I shall be so happy to serve you. You know very well what a debt of gratitude I have to pay you."

In a pretty way she raised her finger to her lips so as to silence him. Nobody owed her anything. She was merely the servant of the ailing and the poor.

At this moment a first patient was making her entry into the Sainte-Honorine Ward. It was Marie,

lying in her wooden box, which Pierre, with Gérard's assistance, had just brought up-stairs. The last to start from the railway station, she had secured admission before the others, thanks to the endless complications which, after keeping them all in suspense, now freed them according to the chance distribution of the admission cards. M. de Guersaint had quitted his daughter at the hospital door by her own desire ; for, fearing the hotels would be very full, she had wished him to secure two rooms for himself and Pierre at once. Then, on reaching the ward, she felt so weary that, after venting her chagrin at not being immediately taken to the Grotto, she consented to be laid on a bed for a short time.

"Come, my child," repeated Madame de Jonquière, "you have three hours before you. We will put you to bed. It will ease you to take you out of that case."

Thereupon the lady-superintendent raised her by the shoulders, whilst Sister Hyacinthe held her feet. The bed was in the central part of the ward, near a window. For a moment the poor girl remained on it with her eyes closed, as though exhausted by being moved about so much. Then it became necessary that Pierre should be readmitted, for she grew very fidgety, saying that there were things which she must explain to him.

"Pray don't go away, my friend," she exclaimed when he approached her. "Take the case out on to the landing, but stay there, because I want to be taken down as soon as I can get permission."

"Do you feel more comfortable now?" asked the young priest.

"Yes, no doubt—but I really don't know. I so much want to be taken yonder to the Blessed Virgin's feet."

However, when Pierre had removed the case, the successive arrivals of the other patients supplied her with some little diversion. Madame Vêtu, whom two bearers had brought up-stairs, holding her under the arms, was laid, fully dressed, on the next bed, where she remained motionless, scarce breathing, with her heavy, yellow, cancerous mask. None of the patients, it should be mentioned, were divested of their clothes, they were simply stretched out on the beds, and advised to go to sleep if they could manage to do so. Those whose complaints were less grievous contented themselves with sitting down on their mattresses, chatting together, and putting the things they had brought with them in order. For instance, Élise Rouquet, who was also near Marie, on the other side of the latter's bed, opened her basket to take a clean fichu out of it, and seemed sorely annoyed at having no hand-glass with her. In less than ten minutes all the beds were occupied, so that when La Grivotte appeared, half carried by Sister Hyacinthe and Sister Claire des Anges, it became necessary to place some mattresses on the floor.

"Here! here is one," exclaimed Madame Désagneaux; "she will be very well here, out of the draught from the door."

Seven other mattresses were soon added in a line, occupying the space between the rows of beds, so

that it became difficult to move about. One had to be very careful, and follow narrow pathways which had been left between the beds and the mattresses. Each of the patients had retained possession of her parcel, or box, or bag, and round about the improvised shakedowns were piles of poor old things, sorry remnants of garments, straying among the sheets and the coverlets. You might have thought yourself in some woeful infirmary, hastily organised after some great catastrophe, some conflagration or earthquake which had thrown hundreds of wounded and penniless beings into the streets.

Madame de Jonquière made her way from one to the other end of the ward, ever and ever repeating, "Come, my children, don't excite yourselves; try to sleep a little."

However, she did not succeed in calming them, and indeed, she herself, like the other lady-hospitallers under her orders, increased the general fever by her own bewilderment. The linen of several patients had to be changed, and there were other needs to be attended to. One woman, suffering from an ulcer in the leg, began moaning so dreadfully that Madame Désagneaux undertook to dress her sore afresh; but she was not skilful, and despite all her passionate courage she almost fainted, so greatly was she distressed by the unbearable odour. Those patients who were in better health asked for broth, bowlfuls of which began to circulate amidst the calls, the answers, and the contradictory orders which nobody executed. And meanwhile, let loose amidst this frightful scramble, little Sophie Couteau, who re-

mained with the Sisters, and was very gay, imagined that it was playtime, and ran, and jumped, and hopped in turn, called and petted first by one and then by another, dear as she was to all alike for the miraculous hope which she brought them.

However, amidst this agitation, the hours went by. Seven o'clock had just struck when Abbé Judaine came in. He was the chaplain of the Sainte-Honorine Ward, and only the difficulty of finding an unoccupied altar at which he might say his mass had delayed his arrival. As soon as he appeared, a cry of impatience arose from every bed.

"Oh! Monsieur le Curé, let us start, let us start at once!"

An ardent desire, which each passing minute heightened and irritated, was upbuoying them, like a more and more devouring thirst, which only the waters of the miraculous fountain could appease. And more fervently than any of the others, La Grivotte, sitting up on her mattress, and joining her hands, begged and begged that she might be taken to the Grotto. Was there not a beginning of the miracle in this—in this awakening of her will power, this feverish desire for cure which enabled her to set herself erect? Inert and fainting on her arrival, she was now seated, turning her dark glances in all directions, waiting and watching for the happy moment when she would be removed. And colour also was returning to her livid face. She was already resuscitating.

"Oh! Monsieur le Curé, pray do tell them to take me—I feel that I shall be cured," she exclaimed.

With a loving, fatherly smile on his good-natured face, Abbé Judaine listened to them all, and allayed their impatience with kind words. They would soon set out; but they must be reasonable, and allow sufficient time for things to be organised; and besides, the Blessed Virgin did not like to have violence done her; she bided her time, and distributed her divine favours among those who behaved themselves the best.

As he paused before Marie's bed and beheld her, stammering entreaties with joined hands, he again paused. "And you, too, my daughter, you are in a hurry?" he said. "Be easy, there is grace enough in heaven for you all."

"I am dying of love, Father," she murmured in reply. "My heart is so swollen with prayers, it stifles me——"

He was greatly touched by the passion of this poor emaciated child, so harshly stricken in her youth and beauty, and wishing to appease her, he called her attention to Madame Vêtu, who did not move, though with her eyes wide open she stared at all who passed.

"Look at madame, how quiet she is!" he said. "She is meditating, and she does right to place herself in God's hands, like a little child."

However, in a scarcely audible voice, a mere breath, Madame Vêtu stammered: "Oh! I am suffering, I am suffering."

At last, at a quarter to eight o'clock, Madame de Jonquière warned her charges that they would do well to prepare themselves. She herself, assisted by

Sister Hyacinthe and Madame Désagneaux, buttoned several dresses, and put shoes on impotent feet. It was a real toilette, for they all desired to appear to the greatest advantage before the Blessed Virgin. A large number had sufficient sense of delicacy to wash their hands. Others unpacked their parcels, and put on clean linen. On her side, Élise Rouquet had ended by discovering a little pocket-glass in the hands of a woman near her, a huge, dropsical creature, who was very coquettish; and having borrowed it, she leant it against the bolster, and then, with infinite care, began to fasten her fichu as elegantly as possible about her head, in order to hide her distorted features. Meanwhile, erect in front of her, little Sophie watched her with an air of profound interest.

It was Abbé Judaine who gave the signal for starting on the journey to the Grotto. He wished, he said, to accompany his dear suffering daughters thither, whilst the lady-hospitallers and the Sisters remained in the ward, so as to put things in some little order again. Then the ward was at once emptied, the patients being carried down-stairs amidst renewed tumult. And Pierre, having replaced Marie's box upon its wheels, took the first place in the *cortège*, which was formed of a score of little hand-carts, bath-chairs, and litters. The other wards, however, were also emptying, the courtyard became crowded, and the *défilé* was organised in haphazard fashion. There was soon an interminable train descending the rather steep slope of the Avenue de la Grotte, so that Pierre was already reaching the Pla-

teau de la Merlasse when the last stretchers were barely leaving the precincts of the hospital.

It was eight o'clock, and the sun, already high, a triumphant August sun, was flaming in the great sky, which was beautifully clear. It seemed as if the blue of the atmosphere, cleansed by the storm of the previous night, were quite new, fresh with youth. And the frightful *défilé*, a perfect "Cour des Miracles" of human woe, rolled along the sloping pavement amid all the brilliancy of that radiant morning. There was no end to the train of abominations; it appeared to grow longer and longer. No order was observed, ailments of all kinds were jumbled together; it seemed like the clearing of some inferno where the most monstrous maladies, the rare and awful cases which provoke a shudder, had been gathered together. Eczema, roseola, elephantiasis, presented a long array of doleful victims. Well-nigh vanished diseases reappeared; one old woman was affected with leprosy, another was covered with impetiginous lichen like a tree which has rotted in the shade. Then came the dropsical ones, inflated like wine-skins; and beside some stretchers there dangled hands twisted by rheumatism, while from others protruded feet swollen by œdema beyond all recognition, looking, in fact, like bags full of rags. One woman, suffering from hydrocephalus, sat in a little cart, the dolorous motions of her head bespeaking her grievous malady. A tall girl afflicted with chorea—St. Vitus's dance—was dancing with every limb, without a pause, the left side of her face being continually distorted by sudden, convulsive grimaces. A younger

one, who followed, gave vent to a bark, a kind of plaintive animal cry, each time that the tic douloureux which was torturing her twisted her mouth and her right cheek, which she seemed to throw forward. Next came the consumptives, trembling with fever, exhausted by dysentery, wasted to skeletons, with livid skins, recalling the colour of that earth in which they would soon be laid to rest; and there was one among them who was quite white, with flaming eyes, who looked indeed like a death's head in which a torch had been lighted. Then every deformity of the contractions followed in succession—twisted trunks, twisted arms, necks askew, all the distortions of poor creatures whom nature had warped and broken; and among these was one whose right hand was thrust back behind her ribs whilst her head fell to the left resting fixedly upon her shoulder. Afterwards came poor rachitic girls displaying waxen complexions and slender necks eaten away by sores, and yellow-faced women in the painful stupor which falls on those whose bosoms are devoured by cancers; whilst others, lying down with their mournful eyes gazing heavenwards, seemed to be listening to the throbs of the tumours which obstructed their organs. And still more and more went by; there was always something more frightful to come; this woman following that other one increased the general shudder of horror. From the neck of a girl of twenty who had a crushed, flattened head like a toad's, there hung so large a goître that it fell even to her waist like the bib of an apron. A blind woman walked along, her head erect, her face pale like marble, dis-

playing the acute inflammation of her poor, ulcerated eyes. An aged woman stricken with imbecility, afflicted with dreadful facial disfigurements, laughed aloud with a terrifying laugh. And all at once an epileptic was seized with convulsions, and began foaming on her stretcher, without, however, causing any stoppage of the procession, which never slackened its march, lashed onward as it was by the blizzard of feverish passion which impelled it towards the Grotto.

The bearers, the priests, and the ailing ones themselves had just intonated a canticle, the song of Bernadette, and all rolled along amid the besetting "Aves," so that the little carts, the litters, and the pedestrians descended the sloping road like a swollen and overflowing torrent of roaring water. At the corner of the Rue Saint-Joseph, near the Plateau de la Merlasse, a family of excursionists, who had come from Cauterets or Bagnères, stood at the edge of the footway, overcome with profound astonishment. These people were evidently well-to-do *bourgeois*, the father and mother very correct in appearance and demeanour, while their two big girls, attired in light-coloured dresses, had the smiling faces of happy creatures who are amusing themselves. But their first feeling of surprise was soon followed by terror, a growing terror, as if they beheld the opening of some pesthouse of ancient times, some hospital of the legendary ages, evacuated after a great epidemic. The two girls became quite pale, while the father and the mother felt icy cold in presence of that endless *défilé* of so many

horrors, the pestilential emanations of which were blown full in their faces. O God! to think that such hideousness, such filth, such suffering, should exist! Was it possible—under that magnificently radiant sun, under those broad heavens so full of light and joy whither the freshness of the Gave's waters ascended, and the breeze of morning wafted the pure perfumes of the mountains!

When Pierre, at the head of the *cortège*, reached the Plateau de la Merlasse, he found himself immersed in that clear sunlight, that fresh and balmy air. He turned round and smiled affectionately at Marie; and as they came out on the Place du Rosaire in the morning splendour, they were both enchanted with the lovely panorama which spread around them.

In front, on the east, was Old Lourdes, lying in a broad fold of the ground beyond a rock. The sun was rising behind the distant mountains, and its oblique rays clearly outlined the dark lilac mass of that solitary rock, which was crowned by the tower and crumbling walls of the ancient castle, once the redoubtable key of the seven valleys. Through the dancing, golden dust you discerned little of the ruined pile except some stately outlines, some huge blocks of building which looked as though reared by Cyclopean hands; and beyond the rock you but vaguely distinguished the discoloured, intermingled house-roofs of the old town. Nearer in than the castle, however, the new town—the rich and noisy city which had sprung up in a few years as though by miracle—spread out on either hand, displaying its

hotels, its stylish shops, its lodging-houses all with white fronts smiling amidst patches of greenery. Then there was the Gave flowing along at the base of the rock, rolling clamorous, clear waters, now blue and now green, now deep as they passed under the old bridge, and now leaping as they careered under the new one, which the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception had built in order to connect the Grotto with the railway station and the recently opened Boulevard. And as a background to this delightful picture, this fresh water, this greenery, this gay, scattered, rejuvenated town, the little and the big Gers arose, two huge ridges of bare rock and low herbage, which, in the projected shade that bathed them, assumed delicate tints of pale mauve and green, fading softly into pink.

Then, upon the north, on the right bank of the Gave, beyond the hills followed by the railway line, the heights of La Buala ascended, their wooded slopes radiant in the morning light. On that side lay Bartrès. More to the left arose the Serre de Julos, dominated by the Miramont. Other crests, far off, faded away into the ether. And in the foreground, rising in tiers among the grassy valleys beyond the Gave, a number of convents, which seemed to have sprung up in this region of prodigies like early vegetation, imparted some measure of life to the landscape. First, there was an Orphan Asylum founded by the Sisters of Nevers, whose vast buildings shone brightly in the sunlight. Next came the Carmelite convent, on the highway to Pau, just in front of the Grotto; and then that of the Assump-

tionists higher up, skirting the road to Poueyferré; whilst the Dominicans showed but a corner of their roofs, sequestered in the far-away solitude. And at last appeared the establishment of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, those who were called the Blue Sisters, and who had founded at the far end of the valley a home where they received well-to-do lady pilgrims, desirous of solitude, as boarders.

At that early hour all the bells of these convents were pealing joyfully in the crystalline atmosphere, whilst the bells of other convents, on the other, the southern horizon, answered them with the same silvery strains of joy. The bell of the nunnery of Sainte Clarissa, near the old bridge, rang a scale of gay, clear notes, which one might have fancied to be the chirruping of a bird. And on this side of the town, also, there were valleys that dipped down between the ridges, and mountains that upreared their bare sides, a commingling of smiling and of agitated nature, an endless surging of heights amongst which you noticed those of Visens, whose slopes the sunlight tinged ornately with soft blue and carmine of a rippling, moire-like effect.

However, when Marie and Pierre turned their eyes to the west, they were quite dazzled. The sun rays were here streaming on the large and the little Bêout with their cupolas of unequal height. And on this side the background was one of gold and purple, a dazzling mountain on whose sides one could only discern the road which snaked between the trees on its way to the Calvary above. And here, too, against the sunlit background, radiant

like an aureola, stood out the three superposed churches which at the voice of Bernadette had sprung from the rock to the glory of the Blessed Virgin. First of all, down below, came the church of the Rosary, squat, circular, and half cut out of the rock, at the farther end of an esplanade on either side of which, like two huge arms, were colossal gradient ways, ascending gently to the Crypt church. Vast labour had been expended here, a quarryful of stones had been cut and set in position, there were arches as lofty as naves supporting the gigantic terraced avenues which had been constructed so that the processions might roll along in all their pomp, and the little conveyances containing sick children might ascend without hindrance to the divine presence. Then came the Crypt, the subterranean church within the rock, with only its low door visible above the church of the Rosary, whose paved roof, with its vast promenade, formed a continuation of the terraced inclines. And at last, from the summit sprang the Basilica, somewhat slender and frail, recalling some finely chased jewel of the Renascence, and looking very new and very white—like a prayer, a spotless dove, soaring aloft from the rocks of Massabielle. The spire, which appeared the more delicate and slight when compared with the gigantic inclines below, seemed like the little vertical flame of a taper set in the midst of the vast landscape, those endless waves of valleys and mountains. By the side, too, of the dense greenery of the Calvary hill, it looked fragile and candid, like childish faith ; and at sight of it you instinctively thought of the little

white arm, the little thin hand of the puny girl, who had here pointed to Heaven in the crisis of her human sufferings. You could not see the Grotto, the entrance of which was on the left, at the base of the rock. Beyond the Basilica, the only buildings which caught the eye were the heavy square pile where the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception had their abode, and the episcopal palace, standing much farther away, in a spreading, wooded valley. And the three churches were flaming in the morning glow, and the rain of gold scattered by the sun rays was sweeping the whole countryside, whilst the flying peals of the bells seemed to be the very vibration of the light, the musical awakening of the lovely day that was now beginning.

Whilst crossing the Place du Rosaire, Pierre and Marie glanced at the Esplanade, the public walk with its long central lawn skirted by broad parallel paths and extending as far as the new bridge. Here, with face turned towards the Basilica, was the great crowned statue of the Virgin. All the sufferers crossed themselves as they went by. And still passionately chanting its canticle, the fearful *cortège* rolled on, through nature in festive array. Under the dazzling sky, past the mountains of gold and purple, amidst the centenarian trees, symbolical of health, the running waters whose freshness was eternal, that *cortège* still and ever marched on with its sufferers, whom nature, if not God, had condemned, those who were afflicted with skin diseases, those whose flesh was eaten away, those who were dropsical and inflated like wine-skins, and those

whom rheumatism and paralysis had twisted into postures of agony. And the victims of hydrocephalus followed, with the dancers of St. Vitus, the consumptives, the rickety, the epileptic, the cancerous, the goitrous, the blind, the mad, and the idiotic. "Ave, ave, ave, Maria!" they sang; and the stubborn plaint acquired increased volume, as nearer and nearer to the Grotto it bore that abominable torrent of human wretchedness and pain, amidst all the fright and horror of the passers-by, who stopped short, unable to stir, their hearts frozen as this nightmare swept before their eyes.

Pierre and Marie were the first to pass under the lofty arcade of one of the terraced inclines. And then, as they followed the quay of the Gave, they all at once came upon the Grotto. And Marie, whom Pierre wheeled as near to the railing as possible, was only able to raise herself in her little conveyance, and murmur: "O most Blessed Virgin, Virgin most loved!"

She had seen neither the entrances to the piscinas nor the twelve-piped fountain, which she had just passed; nor did she distinguish any better the shop on her left hand where crucifixes, chaplets, statuettes, pictures, and other religious articles were sold, or the stone pulpit on her right which Father Massias already occupied. Her eyes were dazzled by the splendour of the Grotto; it seemed to her as if a hundred thousand tapers were burning there behind the railing, filling the low entrance with the glow of a furnace and illuminating, as with star rays, the statue of the Virgin, which stood, higher up, at the

edge of a narrow ogive-like cavity. And for her, apart from that glorious apparition, nothing existed there, neither the crutches with which a part of the vault had been covered, nor the piles of bouquets fading away amidst the ivy and the eglantine, nor even the altar placed in the centre near a little portable organ over which a cover had been thrown. However, as she raised her eyes above the rock, she once more beheld the slender white Basilica profiled against the sky, its slight, tapering spire soaring into the azure of the Infinite like a prayer.

"O Virgin most powerful—Queen of the Virgins—Holy Virgin of Virgins!"

Pierre had now succeeded in wheeling Marie's box to the front rank, beyond the numerous oak benches which were set out here in the open air as in the nave of a church. Nearly all these benches were already occupied by those sufferers who could sit down, while the vacant spaces were soon filled with litters and little vehicles whose wheels became entangled together, and on whose close-packed mattresses and pillows all sorts of diseases were gathered pell-mell. Immediately on arriving, the young priest had recognised the Vignerons seated with their sorry child Gustave in the middle of a bench, and now, on the flagstones, he caught sight of the lace-trimmed bed of Madame Dieulafay, beside whom her husband and sister knelt in prayer. Moreover, all the patients of Madame de Jonquière's carriage took up position here—M. Sabathier and Brother Isidore side by side, Madame Vêtu reclining hopelessly in a conveyance, Élise Rouquet seated, La

Grivotte excited and raising herself on her clenched hands. Pierre also again perceived Madame Maze, standing somewhat apart from the others, and humbling herself in prayer; whilst Madame Vincent, who had fallen on her knees, still holding her little Rose in her arms, presented the child to the Virgin with ardent entreaty, the distracted gesture of a mother soliciting compassion from the mother of divine grace. And around this reserved space was the ever-growing throng of pilgrims, the pressing, jostling mob which gradually stretched to the parapet overlooking the Gave.

"O Virgin most merciful," continued Marie in an undertone, "Virgin most faithful, Virgin conceived without sin!"

Then, almost fainting, she spoke no more, but with her lips still moving, as though in silent prayer, gazed distractedly at Pierre. He thought that she wished to speak to him and leant forward: "Shall I remain here at your disposal to take you to the piscina by-and-by?" he asked.

But as soon as she understood him she shook her head. And then in a feverish way she said: "No, no, I don't want to be bathed this morning. It seems to me that one must be truly worthy, truly pure, truly holy before seeking the miracle! I want to spend the whole morning in imploring it with joined hands; I want to pray, to pray with all my strength and all my soul——" She was stifling, and paused. Then she added: "Don't come to take me back to the hospital till eleven o'clock. I will not let them take me from here till then."

However, Pierre did not go away, but remained near her. For a moment, he even fell upon his knees; he also would have liked to pray with the same burning faith, to beg of God the cure of that poor sick child, whom he loved with such fraternal affection. But since he had reached the Grotto he had felt a singular sensation invading him, a covert revolt, as it were, which hampered the pious flight of his prayer. He wished to believe; he had spent the whole night hoping that belief would once more blossom in his soul, like some lovely flower of innocence and candour, as soon as he should have knelt upon the soil of that land of miracle. And yet he only experienced discomfort and anxiety in presence of the theatrical scene before him, that pale stiff statue in the false light of the tapers, with the chaplet shop full of jostling customers on the one hand, and the large stone pulpit whence a Father of the Assumption was shouting "Aves" on the other. Had his soul become utterly withered then? Could no divine dew again impregnate it with innocence, render it like the souls of little children, who at the slightest caressing touch of the sacred legend give themselves to it entirely?

Then, while his thoughts were still wandering, he recognised Father Massias in the ecclesiastic who occupied the pulpit. He had formerly known him, and was quite stirred by his sombre ardour, by the sight of his thin face and sparkling eyes, by the eloquence which poured from his large mouth as he offered violence to Heaven to compel it to descend upon earth. And whilst he thus examined Father

Massias, astonished at feeling himself so unlike the preacher, he caught sight of Father Fourcade, who, at the foot of the pulpit, was deep in conference with Baron Suire. The latter seemed much perplexed by something which Father Fourcade said to him; however he ended by approving it with a complaisant nod. Then, as Abbé Judaine was also standing there, Father Fourcade likewise spoke to him for a moment, and a scared expression came over the Abbé's broad, fatherly face while he listened; nevertheless, like the Baron, he at last bowed assent.

Then, all at once, Father Fourcade appeared in the pulpit, erect, drawing up his lofty figure which his attack of gout had slightly bent; and he had not wished that Father Massias, his well-loved brother, whom he preferred above all others, should altogether go down the narrow stairway, for he had kept him upon one of the steps, and was leaning on his shoulder. And in a full, grave voice, with an air of sovereign authority which caused perfect silence to reign around, he spoke as follows:

"My dear brethren, my dear sisters, I ask your forgiveness for interrupting your prayers, but I have a communication to make to you, and I have to ask the help of all your faithful souls. We had a very sad accident to deplore this morning, one of our brethren died in one of the trains by which you came to Lourdes, died just as he was about to set foot in the promised land."

A brief pause followed and Father Fourcade seemed to become yet taller, his handsome face beaming with fervour, amidst his long, streaming, royal beard.

"Well, my dear brethren, my dear sisters," he resumed, "in spite of everything, the idea has come to me that we ought not to despair. Who knows if God Almighty did not will that death in order that He might prove His Omnipotence to the world? It is as though a voice were speaking to me, urging me to ascend this pulpit and ask your prayers for this man, this man who is no more, but whose life is nevertheless in the hands of the most Blessed Virgin who can still implore her Divine Son in his favour. Yes, the man is here, I have caused his body to be brought hither, and it depends on you, perhaps, whether a brilliant miracle shall dazzle the universe, if you pray with sufficient ardour to touch the compassion of Heaven. We will plunge the man's body into the piscina and we will entreat the Lord, the master of the world, to resuscitate him, to give unto us this extraordinary sign of His sovereign beneficence!"

An icy thrill, wafted from the Invisible, passed through the listeners. They had all become pale, and though the lips of none of them had opened, it seemed as if a murmur sped through their ranks amidst a shudder.

"But with what ardour must we not pray!" violently resumed Father Fourcade, exalted by genuine faith. "It is your souls, your whole souls, that I ask of you, my dear brothers, my dear sisters, it is a prayer in which you must put your hearts, your blood, your very life with whatever may be most noble and loving in it! Pray with all your strength, pray till you no longer know who you are,

or where you are; pray as one loves, pray as one dies, for that which we are about to ask is so precious, so rare, so astounding a grace that only the energy of our worship can induce God to answer us. And in order that our prayers may be the more efficacious, in order that they may have time to spread and ascend to the feet of the Eternal Father, we will not lower the body into the piscina until four o'clock this afternoon. And now my dear brethren, now my dear sisters, pray, pray to the most Blessed Virgin, the Queen of the Angels, the Comforter of the Afflicted!"

Then he himself, distracted by emotion, resumed the recital of the rosary, whilst near him Father Massias burst into sobs. And thereupon the great anxious silence was broken, contagion seized upon the throng, it was transported and gave vent to shouts, tears, and confused stammered entreaties. It was as though a breath of delirium were sweeping by, reducing men's wills to naught, and turning all these beings into one being, exasperated with love and seized with a mad desire for the impossible prodigy.

And for a moment Pierre had thought that the ground was giving way beneath him, that he was about to fall and faint. But with difficulty he managed to rise from his knees and slowly walked away.

III

FOUNTAIN AND PISCINA

As Pierre went off, ill at ease, mastered by invincible repugnance, unwilling to remain there any longer, he caught sight of M. de Guersaint, kneeling near the Grotto, with the absorbed air of one who is praying with his whole soul. The young priest had not seen him since the morning, and did not know whether he had managed to secure a couple of rooms in one or other of the hotels, so that his first impulse was to go and join him. Then, however, he hesitated, unwilling to disturb his meditations, for he was doubtless praying for his daughter, whom he fondly loved, in spite of the constant absent-mindedness of his volatile brain. Accordingly, the young priest passed on, and took his way under the trees. Nine o'clock was now striking, he had a couple of hours before him.

By dint of money, the wild bank where swine had formerly pastured had been transformed into a superb avenue skirting the Gave. It had been necessary to put back the river's bed in order to gain ground, and lay out a monumental quay bordered by a broad footway, and protected by a parapet.

Some two or three hundred yards farther on, a hill brought the avenue to an end, and it thus resembled an enclosed promenade, provided with benches, and shaded by magnificent trees. Nobody passed along, however ; merely the overflow of the crowd had settled there, and solitary spots still abounded between the grassy wall limiting the promenade on the south, and the extensive fields spreading out northward beyond the Gave, as far as the wooded slopes which the white-walled convents brightened. Under the foliage, on the margin of the running water, one could enjoy delightful freshness, even during the burning days of August.

Thus Pierre, like a man at last awakening from a painful dream, soon found rest of mind again. He had questioned himself in the acute anxiety which he felt with regard to his sensations. Had he not reached Lourdes that morning possessed by a genuine desire to believe, an idea that he was indeed again beginning to believe even as he had done in the docile days of childhood when his mother had made him join his hands, and taught him to fear God ? Yet as soon as he had found himself at the Grotto, the idolatry of the worship, the violence of the display of faith, the onslaught upon human reason which he witnessed, had so disturbed him that he had almost fainted. What would become of him then ? Could he not even try to contend against his doubts by examining things and convincing himself of their truth, thus turning his journey to profit ? At all events, he had made a bad beginning, which left him sorely agitated, and he indeed needed the

environment of those fine trees, that limpid, rushing water, that calm, cool avenue, to recover from the shock.

Still pondering, he was approaching the end of the pathway, when he most unexpectedly met a forgotten friend. He had, for a few seconds, been looking at a tall old gentleman who was coming towards him, dressed in a tightly buttoned frock-coat and broad-brimmed hat; and he had tried to remember where it was that he had previously beheld that pale face, with eagle nose, and black and penetrating eyes. These he had seen before, he felt sure of it; but the promenader's long white beard and long curly white hair perplexed him. However, the other halted, also looking extremely astonished, though he promptly exclaimed, "What, Pierre? Is it you, at Lourdes?"

Then all at once the young priest recognised Doctor Chassaigne, his father's old friend, his own friend, the man who had cured and consoled him in the terrible physical and mental crisis which had come upon him after his mother's death.

"Ah! my dear doctor, how pleased I am to see you!" he replied.

They embraced with deep emotion. And now, in presence of that snowy hair and snowy beard, that slow walk, that sorrowful demeanour, Pierre remembered with what unrelenting ferocity misfortune had fallen on that unhappy man and aged him. But a few years had gone by, and now, when they met again, he was bowed down by destiny.

"You did not know, I suppose, that I had re-

mained at Lourdes?" said the doctor. "It 's true that I no longer write to anybody; in fact, I am no longer among the living. I live in the land of the dead." Tears were gathering in his eyes, and emotion made his voice falter as he resumed: "There! come and sit down on that bench yonder; it will please me to live the old days afresh with you, just for a moment."

In his turn the young priest felt his sobs choking him. He could only murmur: "Ah! my dear doctor, my old friend, I can truly tell you that I pitied you with my whole heart, my whole soul."

Doctor Chassaigne's story was one of disaster, the shipwreck of a life. He and his daughter Marguerite, a tall and lovable girl of twenty, had gone to Cauterets with Madame Chassaigne, the model wife and mother, whose state of health had made them somewhat anxious. A fortnight had elapsed and she seemed much better, and was already planning several pleasure trips, when one morning she was found dead in her bed. Her husband and daughter were overwhelmed, stupefied by this sudden blow, this cruel treachery of death. The doctor, who belonged to Bartrès, had a family vault in the Lourdes cemetery, a vault constructed at his own expense, and in which his father and mother already rested. He desired, therefore, that his wife should be interred there, in a compartment adjoining that in which he expected soon to lie himself. And after the burial he had lingered for a week at Lourdes, when Marguerite, who was with him, was seized with a great shivering, and, taking to her bed one

evening, died two days afterwards without her distracted father being able to form any exact notion of the illness which had carried her off. And thus it was not himself, but his daughter, lately radiant with beauty and health, in the very flower of her youth, who was laid in the vacant compartment by the mother's side. The man who had been so happy, so worshipped by his two helpmates, whose heart had been kept so warm by the love of two dear creatures all his own, was now nothing more than an old, miserable, stammering, lost being, who shivered in his icy solitude. All the joy of his life had departed; he envied the men who broke stones upon the highways when he saw their barefooted wives and daughters bring them their dinners at noontide. And he had refused to leave Lourdes, he had relinquished everything, his studies, his practice in Paris, in order that he might live near the tomb in which his wife and his daughter slept the eternal sleep.

"Ah, my old friend," repeated Pierre, "how I pitied you! How frightful must have been your grief! But why did you not rely a little on those who love you? Why did you shut yourself up here with your sorrow?"

The doctor made a gesture which embraced the horizon. "I could not go away, they are here and keep me with them. It is all over, I am merely waiting till my time comes to join them again."

Then silence fell. Birds were fluttering among the shrubs on the bank behind them, and in front they heard the loud murmur of the Gave. The sun rays were falling more heavily in a slow, golden

dust, upon the hillsides; but on that retired bench under the beautiful trees, the coolness was still delightful. And although the crowd was but a couple of hundred yards distant, they were, so to say, in a desert, for nobody tore himself away from the Grotto to stray as far as the spot which they had chosen.

They talked together for a long time, and Pierre related under what circumstances he had reached Lourdes that morning with M. de Guersaint and his daughter, all three forming part of the national pilgrimage. Then all at once he gave a start of astonishment and exclaimed: "What! doctor, so you now believe that miracles are possible? You, good heavens! whom I knew as an unbeliever, or at least as one altogether indifferent to these matters?"

He was gazing at M. Chassaigne quite stupefied by something which he had just heard him say of the Grotto and Bernadette. It was amazing, coming from a man with so strong a mind, a savant of such intelligence, whose powerful analytical faculties he had formerly so much admired! How was it that a lofty, clear mind, nourished by experience and method, had become so changed as to acknowledge the miraculous cures effected by that divine fountain which the Blessed Virgin had caused to spurt forth under the pressure of a child's fingers?

"But just think a little, my dear doctor," he resumed. "It was you yourself who supplied my father with memoranda about Bernadette, your little fellow-villager as you used to call her; and it was you, too, who spoke to me at such length about her,

when, later on, I took a momentary interest in her story. In your eyes she was simply an ailing child, prone to hallucinations, infantile, but self-conscious of her acts, deficient of will-power. Recollect our chats together, my doubts, and the healthy reason which you again enabled me to acquire!"

Pierre was feeling very moved, for was not this the strangest of adventures? He a priest, who in a spirit of resignation had formerly endeavoured to believe, had ended by completely losing all faith through intercourse with this same doctor, who was then an unbeliever, but whom he now found converted, conquered by the supernatural, whilst he himself was racked by the torture of no longer believing.

"You who would only rely on accurate facts," he said, "you who based everything on observation! Do you renounce science then?"

Chassaigne, hitherto quiet, with a sorrowful smile playing on his lips, now made a violent gesture expressive of sovereign contempt. "Science indeed!" he exclaimed. "Do I know anything? Can I accomplish anything? You asked me just now what malady it was that killed my poor Marguerite. But I do not know! I, whom people think so learned, so well armed against death, I understood nothing of it, and I could do nothing—not even prolong my daughter's life for a single hour! And my wife, whom I found in bed already cold, when on the previous evening she had lain down in much better health and quite gay—was I even capable of foreseeing what ought to have been done in her case? No, no! for me at all events, science has become bank-

rupt. I wish to know nothing ; I am but a fool and a poor old man ! ''

He spoke like this in a furious revolt against all his past life of pride and happiness. Then, having become calm again, he added : '' And now I only feel a frightful remorse. Yes, a remorse which haunts me, which ever brings me here, prowling around the people who are praying. It is remorse for not having in the first instance come and humbled myself at that Grotto, bringing my two dear ones with me. They would have knelt there like those women whom you see, I should have knelt beside them, and perhaps the Blessed Virgin would have cured and preserved them. But, fool that I was, I only knew how to lose them ! It is my fault.''

Tears were now streaming from his eyes. '' I remember,'' he continued, '' that in my childhood at Bartrès, my mother, a peasant woman, made me join my hands and implore God's help each morning. The prayer she taught me came back to my mind, word for word, when I again found myself alone, as weak, as lost, as a little child. What would you have, my friend ? I joined my hands as in my younger days, I felt too wretched, too forsaken, I had too keen a need of a superhuman help, of a divine power which should think and determine for me, which should lull me and carry me on with its eternal prescience. How great at first was the confusion, the aberration of my poor brain, under the frightful, heavy blow which fell upon it ! I spent a score of nights without being able to sleep, thinking

that I should surely go mad. All sorts of ideas warred within me; I passed through periods of revolt when I shook my fist at Heaven, and then I lapsed into humility, entreating God to take me in my turn. And it was at last a conviction that there must be justice, a conviction that there must be love, which calmed me by restoring me my faith. You knew my daughter, so tall and strong, so beautiful, so brimful of life. Would it not be the most monstrous injustice if for her, who did not know life, there should be nothing beyond the tomb? She will live again, I am absolutely convinced of it, for I still hear her at times, she tells me that we shall meet, that we shall see one another again. Oh! the dear beings whom one has lost, my dear daughter, my dear wife, to see them once more, to live with them elsewhere, that is the one hope, the one consolation for all the sorrows of this world! I have given myself to God, since God alone can restore them to me!"

He was shaking with a slight tremor, like the weak old man he had become; and Pierre was at last able to understand and explain the conversion of this savant, this man of intellect who, growing old, had reverted to belief under the influence of sentiment. First of all, and this he had previously suspected, he discovered a kind of atavism of faith in this Pyrenean, this son of peasant mountaineers, who had been brought up in belief of the legend, and whom the legend had again mastered even when fifty years of positive study had rolled over it. Then, too, there was human weariness; this man,

to whom science had not brought happiness, revolted against science on the day when it seemed to him shallow, powerless to prevent him from shedding tears. And finally there was discouragement, a doubt of all things, ending in a need of certainty on the part of one whom age had softened, and who felt happy at being able to fall asleep in credulity.

Pierre did not protest, however; he did not jeer, for his heart was rent at sight of this tall, stricken old man, with his woeful senility. Is it not indeed pitiful to see the strongest, the clearest-minded become mere children again under such blows of fate? "Ah!" he faintly sighed, "if I could only suffer enough to be able to silence my reason, and kneel yonder and believe in all those fine stories."

The pale smile, which at times still passed over Doctor Chassaigne's lips, reappeared on them. "You mean the miracles?" said he. "You are a priest, my child, and I know what your misfortune is. The miracles seem impossible to you. But what do you know of them? Admit that you know nothing, and that what to our senses seems impossible is every minute taking place. And now we have been talking together for a long time, and eleven o'clock will soon strike, so that you must return to the Grotto. However, I shall expect you at half-past three, when I will take you to the Medical Verification Office, where I hope I shall be able to show you some surprising things. Don't forget, at half-past three."

Thereupon he sent him off, and remained on the bench alone. The heat had yet increased, and the

distant hills were burning in the furnace-like glow of the sun. However, he lingered there forgetfully, dreaming in the greeny half-light amidst the foliage, and listening to the continuous murmur of the Gave, as if a voice, a dear voice from the realms beyond, were speaking to him.

Pierre meantime hastened back to Marie. He was able to join her without much difficulty, for the crowd was thinning, a good many people having already gone off to *déjeuner*. And on arriving he perceived the girl's father, who was quietly seated beside her, and who at once wished to explain to him the reason of his long absence. For more than a couple of hours that morning he had scoured Lourdes in all directions, applying at twenty hotels in turn without being able to find the smallest closet where they might sleep. Even the servants' rooms were let and you could not have even secured a mattress on which to stretch yourself in some passage. However, all at once, just as he was despairing, he had discovered two rooms, small ones, it is true, and just under the roof, but in a very good hotel, that of the Apparitions, one of the best patronised in the town. The persons who had retained these rooms had just telegraphed that the patient whom they had meant to bring with them was dead. Briefly, it was a piece of rare good luck, and seemed to make M. de Guersaint quite gay.

Eleven o'clock was now striking and the woeful procession of sufferers started off again through the sunlit streets and squares. When it reached the hospital Marie begged her father and Pierre to go

to the hotel, lunch and rest there awhile, and return to fetch her at two o'clock, when the patients would again be conducted to the Grotto. But when, after lunching, the two men went up to the rooms which they were to occupy at the Hotel of the Apparitions, M. de Guersaint, overcome by fatigue, fell so soundly asleep that Pierre had not the heart to awaken him. What would have been the use of it? His presence was not indispensable. And so the young priest returned to the hospital alone. Then the *cortège* again descended the Avenue de la Grotte, again wended its way over the Plateau de la Merlasse, again crossed the Place du Rosaire, past an ever-growing crowd which shuddered and crossed itself amid all the joyousness of that splendid August day. It was now the most glorious hour of a lovely afternoon.

When Marie was again installed in front of the Grotto she inquired if her father were coming. "Yes," answered Pierre; "he is only taking a little rest."

She waved her hand as though to say that he was acting rightly, and then in a sorely troubled voice she added: "Listen, Pierre; don't take me to the piscina for another hour. I am not yet in a state to find favour from Heaven, I wish to pray, to keep on praying."

After evincing such an ardent desire to come to Lourdes, terror was agitating her now that the moment for attempting the miracle was at hand. In fact, she began to relate that she had been unable to eat anything, and a girl who overheard her at once

approached saying: "If you feel too weak, my dear young lady, remember we have some broth here."

Marie looked at her and recognised Raymonde. Several young girls were in this wise employed at the Grotto to distribute cups of broth and milk among the sufferers. Some of them, indeed, in previous years had displayed so much coquetry in the matter of silk aprons trimmed with lace, that a uniform apron, of modest linen, with a small check pattern, blue and white, had been imposed on them. Nevertheless, in spite of this enforced simplicity, Raymonde, thanks to her freshness and her active, good-natured, housewifely air, had succeeded in making herself look quite charming.

"You will remember, won't you?" she added; "you have only to make me a sign and I will serve you."

Marie thanked her, saying, however, that she felt sure she would not be able to take anything; and then, turning towards the young priest, she resumed: "One hour—you must allow me one more hour, my friend."

Pierre wished at any rate to remain near her, but the entire space was reserved to the sufferers, the bearers not being allowed there. So he had to retire, and, caught in the rolling waves of the crowd, he found himself carried towards the piscinas, where he came upon an extraordinary spectacle which stayed his steps. In front of the low buildings where the baths were, three by three, six for the women and three for the men, he perceived under the trees a long stretch of ground enclosed by a rope

fastened to the tree-trunks; and here, various sufferers, some sitting in their bath-chairs and others lying on the mattresses of their litters, were drawn up in line, waiting to be bathed, whilst outside the rope, a huge, excited throng was ever pressing and surging. A Capuchin, erect in the centre of the reserved space, was at that moment conducting the prayers. "Aves" followed one after the other, repeated by the crowd in a loud confused murmur. Then, all at once, as Madame Vincent, who, pale with agony, had long been waiting, was admitted to the baths, carrying her dear burden, her little girl who looked like a waxen image of the child Christ, the Capuchin let himself fall upon his knees with his arms extended, and cried aloud: "Lord, heal our sick!" He raised this cry a dozen, twenty times, with a growing fury, and each time the crowd repeated it, growing more and more excited at each shout, till it sobbed and kissed the ground in a state of frenzy. It was like a hurricane of delirium rushing by and laying every head in the dust. Pierre was utterly distracted by the sob of suffering which arose from the very bowels of these poor folks—at first a prayer, growing louder and louder, then bursting forth like a demand in impatient, angry, deafening, obstinate accents, as though to compel the help of Heaven. "Lord, heal our sick!"—"Lord, heal our sick!" The shout soared on high incessantly.

An incident occurred, however; La Grivotte was weeping hot tears because they would not bathe her. "They say that I 'm a consumptive," she plaintively exclaimed, "and that they can't dip con-

sumptives in cold water. Yet they dipped one this morning; I saw her. So why won't they dip me? I've been wearing myself out for the last half-hour in telling them that they are only grieving the Blessed Virgin, for I am going to be cured, I feel it, I am going to be cured!"

As she was beginning to cause a scandal, one of the chaplains of the piscinas approached and endeavoured to calm her. They would see what they could do for her, by-and-by, said he; they would consult the reverend Fathers, and, if she were very good, perhaps they would bathe her all the same.

Meantime the cry continued: "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!" And Pierre, who had just perceived Madame Vêtu, also waiting at the piscina entry, could no longer turn his eyes away from her hope-tortured face, whose eyes were fixed upon the doorway by which the happy ones, the elect, emerged from the divine presence, cured of all their ailments. However, a sudden increase of the crowd's frenzy, a perfect rage of entreaties, gave him such a shock as to draw tears from his eyes. Madame Vincent was now coming out again, still carrying her little girl in her arms, her wretched, her fondly loved little girl, who had been dipped in a fainting state in the icy water, and whose little face, but imperfectly wiped, was as pale as ever, and indeed even more woeful and lifeless. The mother was sobbing, crucified by this long agony, reduced to despair by the refusal of the Blessed Virgin, who had remained insensible to her child's sufferings. And yet when Madame Vêtu in her turn entered,

with the eager passion of a dying woman about to drink the water of life, the haunting, obstinate cry burst out again, without sign of discouragement or lassitude: "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!" The Capuchin had now fallen with his face to the ground, and the howling crowd, with arms outstretched, devoured the soil with its kisses.

Pierre wished to join Madame Vincent to soothe her with a few kind, encouraging words; however, a fresh string of pilgrims not only prevented him from passing, but threw him towards the fountain which another throng besieged. There was here quite a range of low buildings, a long stone wall with carved coping, and it had been necessary for the people to form in procession, although there were twelve taps from which the water fell into a narrow basin. Many came hither to fill bottles, metal cans, and stoneware pitchers. To prevent too great a waste of water, the tap only acted when a knob was pressed with the hand. And thus many weak-handed women lingered there a long time, the water dripping on their feet. Those who had no cans to fill at least came to drink and wash their faces. Pierre noticed one young man who drank seven small glassfuls of water, and washed his eyes seven times without wiping them. Others were drinking out of shells, tin goblets, and leather cups. And he was particularly interested by the sight of Élise Rouquet, who, thinking it useless to go to the piscinas to bathe the frightful sore which was eating away her face, had contented herself with employing the water of the fountain as a lotion, every two hours since her

arrival that morning. She knelt down, threw back her fichu, and for a long time applied a handkerchief to her face—a handkerchief which she had soaked with the miraculous fluid like a sponge; and the crowd around rushed upon the fountain in such fury that folks no longer noticed her diseased face, but washed themselves and drank from the same pipe at which she constantly moistened her handkerchief.

Just then, however, Gérard, who passed by dragging M. Sabathier to the piscinas, called to Pierre, whom he saw unoccupied, and asked him to come and help him, for it would not be an easy task to move and bathe this helpless victim of ataxia. And thus Pierre lingered with the sufferer in the men's piscina for nearly half an hour, whilst Gérard returned to the Grotto to fetch another patient. These piscinas seemed to the young priest to be very well arranged. They wrere divided into three compartments, three baths separated by partitions, with steps leading into them. In order that one might isolate the patient, a linen curtain hung before each entry, which was reached through a kind of waiting-room having a paved floor, and furnished with a bench and a couple of chairs. Here the patients undressed and dressed themselves with an awkward haste, a nervous kind of shame. One man, whom Pierre found there when he entered, was still naked, and wrapped himself in the curtain before putting on a bandage with trembling hands. Another one, a consumptive who was frightfully emaciated, sat shivering and groaning, his livid skin mottled with violet marks. How-

ever, Pierre became more interested in Brother Isidore, who was just being removed from one of the baths. He had fainted away, and for a moment, indeed, it was thought that he was dead. But at last he began moaning again, and one's heart filled with pity at sight of his long, lank frame, which suffering had withered, and which, with his diseased hip, looked a human remnant on exhibition. The two hospitallers who had been bathing him had the greatest difficulty to put on his shirt, fearful as they were that if he were suddenly shaken he might expire in their arms.

"You will help me, Monsieur l'Abbé, won't you?" asked another hospitaller as he began to undress M. Sabathier.

Pierre hastened to give his services, and found that the attendant, discharging such humble duties, was none other than the Marquis de Salmon-Roquebert whom M. de Guersaint had pointed out to him on the way from the station to the hospital that morning. A man of forty, with a large, aquiline, knightly nose set in a long face, the Marquis was the last representative of one of the most ancient and illustrious families of France. Possessing a large fortune, a regal mansion in the Rue de Lille at Paris, and vast estates in Normandy, he came to Lourdes each year, for the three days of the national pilgrimage, influenced solely by his benevolent feelings, for he had no religious zeal and simply observed the rites of the Church because it was customary for noblemen to do so. And he obstinately declined any high functions. Resolved to remain a hospitaller,

he had that year assumed the duty of bathing the patients, exhausting the strength of his arms, employing his fingers from morning till night in handling rags and re-applying dressings to sores.

"Be careful," he said to Pierre; "take off the stockings very slowly. Just now, some flesh came away when they were taking off the things of that poor fellow who is being dressed again, over yonder."

Then, leaving M. Sabathier for a moment in order to put on the shoes of the unhappy sufferer whom he alluded to, the Marquis found the left shoe wet inside. Some matter had flowed into the fore part of it, and he had to take the usual medical precautions before putting it on the patient's foot, a task which he performed with extreme care, and so as not to touch the man's leg, into which an ulcer was eating.

"And now," he said to Pierre, as he returned to M. Sabathier, "pull down the drawers at the same time I do, so that we may get them off at one pull."

In addition to the patients and the hospitallers selected for duty at the piscinas, the only person in the little dressing-room was a chaplain who kept on repeating "Paters" and "Aves," for not even a momentary pause was allowed in the prayers. Merely a loose curtain hung before the doorway leading to the open space which the rope enclosed; and the ardent clamorous entreaties of the throng were incessantly wafted into the room, with the piercing shouts of the Capuchin, who ever repeated: "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!" A

cold light fell from the high windows of the building and constant dampness reigned there, with the mouldy smell like that of a cellar dripping with water.

At last M. Sabathier was stripped, divested of all garments save a little apron which had been fastened about his loins for decency's sake.

"Pray don't plunge me," said he; "let me down into the water by degrees."

In point of fact that cold water quite terrified him. He was still wont to relate that he had experienced such a frightful chilling sensation on the first occasion that he had sworn never to go in again. According to his account, there could be no worse torture than that icy cold. And then too, as he put it, the water was scarcely inviting; for, through fear lest the output of the source should not suffice, the Fathers of the Grotto only allowed the water of the baths to be changed twice a day. And nearly a hundred patients being dipped in the same water, it can be imagined what a terrible soup the latter at last became. All manner of things were found in it, so that it was like a frightful *consommé* of all ailments, a field of cultivation for every kind of poisonous germ, a quintessence of the most dreaded contagious diseases; the miraculous feature of it all being that men should emerge alive from their immersion in such filth.

"Gently, gently," repeated M. Sabathier to Pierre and the Marquis, who had taken hold of him under the hips in order to carry him to the bath. And he gazed with childlike terror at that thick, livid water

on which floated so many greasy, nauseating patches of scum. However, his dread of the cold was so great that he preferred the polluted baths of the afternoon, since all the bodies that were dipped in the water during the early part of the day ended by slightly warming it.

"We will let you slide down the steps," exclaimed the Marquis in an undertone; and then he instructed Pierre to hold the patient with all his strength under the arm-pits.

"Have no fear," replied the priest; "I will not let go."

M. Sabathier was then slowly lowered. You could now only see his back, his poor painful back which swayed and swelled, mottled by the rippling of a shiver. And when they dipped him his head fell back in a spasm, a sound like the cracking of bones was heard, and breathing hard, he almost stifled.

The chaplain, standing beside the bath, had begun calling with renewed fervour: "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!"

M. de Salmon-Roquebert repeated the cry, which the regulations required the hospitallers to raise at each fresh immersion. Pierre, therefore, had to imitate his companion, and his pitiful feelings at the sight of so much suffering were so intense that he regained some little of his faith. It was long indeed since he had prayed like this, devoutly wishing that there might be a God in heaven, whose omnipotence could assuage the wretchedness of humanity. At the end of three or four minutes, however, when with great difficulty they drew M. Sabathier, livid and

shivering, out of the bath, the young priest fell into deeper, more despairing sorrow than ever at beholding how downcast, how overwhelmed the sufferer was at having experienced no relief. Again had he made a futile attempt; for the seventh time the Blessed Virgin had not deigned to listen to his prayers. He closed his eyes, from between the lids of which big tears began to roll while they were dressing him again.

Then Pierre recognised little Gustave Vigneron coming in, on his crutch, to take his first bath. His relatives, his father, his mother, and his aunt, Madame Chaise, all three of substantial appearance and exemplary piety, had just fallen on their knees at the door. Whispers ran through the crowd; it was said that the gentleman was a functionary of the Ministry of Finances. However, while the child was beginning to undress, a tumult arose, and Father Fourcade and Father Massias, suddenly arriving, gave orders to suspend the immersions. The great miracle was about to be attempted, the extraordinary favour which had been so ardently prayed for since the morning—the restoration of the dead man to life.

The prayers were continuing outside, rising in a furious appeal which died away in the sky of that warm summer afternoon. Two bearers came in with a covered stretcher, which they deposited in the middle of the dressing-room. Baron Suire, President of the Association, followed, accompanied by Berthaud, one of its principal officers, for the affair was causing a great stir among the whole staff, and before anything was done a few words were ex-

changed in low voices between the gentlemen and the two Fathers of the Assumption. Then the latter fell upon their knees, with arms extended, and began to pray, their faces illumined, transfigured by their burning desire to see God's omnipotence displayed.

"Lord, hear us! Lord, grant our prayer!"

M. Sabathier had just been taken away, and the only patient now present was little Gustave, who had remained on a chair, half-undressed and forgotten. The curtains of the stretcher were raised, and the man's corpse appeared, already stiff, and seemingly reduced and shrunken, with large eyes which had obstinately remained wide open. It was necessary, however, to undress the body, which was still fully clad, and this terrible duty made the bearers momentarily hesitate. Pierre noticed that the Marquis de Salmon-Roquebert, who showed such devotion to the living, such freedom from all repugnance whenever they were in question, had now drawn aside and fallen on his knees, as though to avoid the necessity of touching that lifeless corpse. And the young priest thereupon followed his example, and knelt near him in order to keep countenance.

Father Massias meanwhile was gradually becoming excited, praying in so loud a voice that it drowned that of his superior, Father Fourcade: "Lord, restore our brother to us!" he cried. "Lord, do it for Thy glory!"

One of the hospitallers had already begun to pull at the man's trousers, but his legs were so stiff that the garment would not come off. In fact the corpse

ought to have been raised up; and the other hospitaller, who was unbuttoning the dead man's old frock coat, remarked in an undertone that it would be best to cut everything away with a pair of scissors. Otherwise there would be no end of the job.

Berthaud, however, rushed up to them, after rapidly consulting Baron Suire. As a politician he secretly disapproved of Father Fourcade's action in making such an attempt, only they could not now do otherwise than carry matters to an issue; for the crowd was waiting and had been entreating God on the dead man's behalf ever since the morning. The wisest course, therefore, was to finish with the affair at once, showing as much respect as possible for the remains of the deceased. In lieu, therefore, of pulling the corpse about in order to strip it bare, Berthaud was of opinion that it would be better to dip it in the piscina clad as it was. Should the man resuscitate, it would be easy to procure fresh clothes for him; and in the contrary event, no harm would have been done. This is what he hastily said to the bearers; and forthwith he helped them to pass some straps under the man's hips and arms.

Father Fourcade had nodded his approval of this course, whilst Father Massias prayed with increased fervour: "Breathe upon him, O Lord, and he shall be born anew! Restore his soul to him, O, Lord, that he may glorify Thee!"

Making an effort, the two hospitallers now raised the man by means of the straps, carried him to the bath, and slowly lowered him into the water, at each moment fearing that he would slip away from their

hold. Pierre, although overcome by horror, could not do otherwise than look at them, and thus he distinctly beheld the immersion of this corpse in its sorry garments, which on being wetted clung to the bones, outlining the skeleton-like figure of the deceased, who floated like a man who has been drowned. But the repulsive part of it all was, that in spite of the *rigor mortis*, the head fell backward into the water, and was submerged by it. In vain did the hospitallers try to raise it by pulling the shoulder straps ; as they made the attempt, the man almost sank to the bottom of the bath. And how could he have recovered his breath when his mouth was full of water, his staring eyes seemingly dying afresh, beneath that watery veil ?

Then, during the three long minutes allowed for the immersion, the two Fathers of the Assumption and the chaplain, in a paroxysm of desire and faith, strove to compel the intervention of Heaven, praying in such loud voices that they seemed to choke.

" Do Thou but look on him, O Lord, and he will live again ! Lord ! may he rise at Thy voice to convert the earth ! Lord ! Thou hast but one word to say and all Thy people will acclaim Thee ! "

At last, as though some vessel had broken in his throat, Father Massias fell groaning and choking on his elbows, with only enough strength left him to kiss the flagstones. And from without came the clamour of the crowd, the ever-repeated cry, which the Capuchin was still leading : " Lord, heal our sick ! Lord, heal our sick ! " This appeal seemed so singular at that moment, that Pierre's sufferings

were increased. He could feel, too, that the Marquis was shuddering beside him. And so the relief was general when Berthaud, thoroughly annoyed with the whole business, curtly shouted to the hospitallers: "Take him out! Take him out at once!"

The body was removed from the bath and laid on the stretcher, looking like the corpse of a drowned man with its sorry garments clinging to its limbs. The water was trickling from the hair, and rivulets began falling on either side, spreading out in pools on the floor. And naturally, dead as the man had been, dead he remained.

The others had all risen and stood looking at him amidst a distressing silence. Then, as he was covered up and carried away, Father Fourcade followed the bier leaning on the shoulder of Father Massias and dragging his gouty leg, the painful weight of which he had momentarily forgotten. But he was already recovering his strong serenity, and as a hush fell upon the crowd outside, he could be heard saying: "My dear brothers, my dear sisters, God has not been willing to restore him to us, doubtless because in His infinite goodness He has desired to retain him among His elect."

And that was all; there was no further question of the dead man. Patients were again being brought into the dressing-room, the two other baths were already occupied. And now little Gustave, who had watched that terrible scene with his keen inquisitive eyes, evincing no sign of terror, finished undressing himself. His wretched body, the body of a scrofulous child, appeared with its prominent ribs and pro-

jecting spine, its limbs so thin that they looked like mere walking-sticks. Especially was this the case as regards the left one, which was withered, wasted to the bone; and he also had two sores, one on the hip, and the other in the loins, the last a terrible one, the skin being eaten away so that you distinctly saw the raw flesh. Yet he smiled, rendered so precocious by his sufferings that, although but fifteen years old and looking no more than ten, he seemed to be endowed with the reason and philosophy of a grown man.

The Marquis de Salmon-Roquebert, who had taken him gently in his arms, refused Pierre's offer of service: "Thanks, but he weighs no more than a bird. And don't be frightened, my dear little fellow. I will do it gently."

"Oh, I am not afraid of cold water, monsieur," replied the boy; "you may duck me."

Then he was lowered into the bath in which the dead man had been dipped. Madame Vigneron and Madame Chaise, who were not allowed to enter, had remained at the door on their knees, whilst the father, M. Vigneron, who was admitted into the dressing-room, went on making the sign of the cross.

Finding that his services were no longer required, Pierre now departed. The sudden idea that three o'clock must have long since struck and that Marie must be waiting for him made him hasten his steps. However, whilst he was endeavouring to pierce the crowd, he saw the girl arrive in her little conveyance, dragged along by Gérard, who had not ceased transporting sufferers to the piscina. She had become im-

patient, suddenly filled with a conviction that she was at last in a frame of mind to find grace. And at sight of Pierre she reproached him, saying, "What, my friend, did you forget me?"

He could find no answer, but watched her as she was taken into the piscina reserved for women, and then, in mortal sorrow, fell upon his knees. It was there that he would wait for her, humbly kneeling, in order that he might take her back to the Grotto, cured without doubt and singing a hymn of praise. Since she was certain of it, would she not assuredly be cured? However, it was in vain that he sought for words of prayer in the depths of his distracted being. He was still under the blow of all the terrible things that he had beheld, worn out with physical fatigue, his brain depressed, no longer knowing what he saw or what he believed. His desperate affection for Marie alone remained, making him long to humble himself and supplicate, in the thought that when little ones really love and entreat the powerful they end by obtaining favours. And at last he caught himself repeating the prayers of the crowd, in a distressful voice that came from the depths of his being: "Lord, heal our sick! Lord, heal our sick!"

Ten minutes, a quarter of an hour perhaps, went by. Then Marie reappeared in her little conveyance. Her face was very pale and wore an expression of despair. Her beautiful hair was fastened above her head in a heavy golden coil which the water had not touched. And she was not cured. The stupor of infinite discouragement hollowed and lengthened her face, and she averted her eyes as

though to avoid meeting those of the priest who thunderstruck, chilled to the heart, at last made up his mind to grasp the handle of the little vehicle, so as to take the girl back to the Grotto.

And meantime the cry of the faithful, who with open arms were kneeling there and kissing the earth, again rose with a growing fury, excited by the Capuchin's shrill voice: "Lord, heal our sick! Heal our sick, O Lord!"

As Pierre was placing Marie in position again in front of the Grotto, an attack of weakness came over her and she almost fainted. Gérard, who was there, saw Raymonde quickly hurry to the spot with a cup of broth, and at once they began zealously rivalling each other in their attentions to the ailing girl. Raymonde, holding out the cup in a pretty way, and assuming the coaxing airs of an expert nurse, especially insisted that Marie should accept the *bouillon;* and Gérard, glancing at this portionless girl, could not help finding her charming, already expert in the business of life, and quite ready to manage a household with a firm hand without ceasing to be amiable. Berthaud was no doubt right, this was the wife that he, Gérard, needed.

"Mademoiselle," said he to Raymonde, "shall I raise the young lady a little?"

"Thank you, monsieur, I am quite strong enough. And besides I will give it to her in spoonfuls; that will be the better way."

Marie, however, obstinately preserving her fierce silence as she recovered consciousness, refused the broth with a gesture. She wished to be left in quiet-

ness, she did not want anybody to question her. And it was only when the others had gone off smiling at one another, that she said to Pierre in a husky voice : " Has not my father come then ? "

After hesitating for a moment the priest was obliged to confess the truth. " I left him sleeping and he cannot have woke up."

Then Marie relapsed into her state of languid stupor and dismissed him in his turn, with the gesture with which she declined all succour. She no longer prayed, but remained quite motionless, gazing fixedly with her large eyes at the marble Virgin, the white statue amidst the radiance of the Grotto. And as four o'clock was now striking, Pierre with his heart sore went off to the Verification Office, having suddenly remembered the appointment given him by Doctor Chassaigne.

IV

VERIFICATION

THE doctor was waiting for the young priest outside the Verification Office, in front of which a compact and feverish crowd of pilgrims was assembled, waylaying and questioning the patients who went in, and acclaiming them as they came out whenever the news spread of any miracle, such as the restoration of some blind man's sight, some deaf woman's hearing, or some paralytic's power of motion.

Pierre had no little difficulty in making his way through the throng, but at last he reached his friend. "Well," he asked, "are we going to have a miracle —a real, incontestable one I mean?"

The doctor smiled, indulgent despite his new faith. "Ah, well," said he, "a miracle is not worked to order. God intervenes when He pleases."

Some hospitallers were mounting guard at the door, but they all knew M. Chassaigne, and respectfully drew aside to let him enter with his companion. The office where the cures were verified was very badly installed in a wretched wooden shanty divided into two apartments, first a narrow ante-chamber, and then a general meeting room which was by no means

so large as it should have been. However, there was a question of providing the department with better accommodation the following year; with which view some large premises, under one of the inclined ways of the Rosary, were already being fitted up.

The only article of furniture in the antechamber was a wooden bench on which Pierre perceived two female patients awaiting their turn in the charge of a young hospitaller. But on entering the meeting room the number of persons packed inside it quite surprised him, whilst the suffocating heat within those wooden walls on which the sun was so fiercely playing, almost scorched his face. It was a square bare room, painted a light yellow, with the panes of its single window covered with whitening, so that the pressing throng outside might see nothing of what went on within. One dared not even open this window to admit a little fresh air, for it was no sooner set ajar than a crowd of inquisitive heads peeped in. The furniture was of a very rudimentary kind, consisting simply of two deal tables of unequal height placed end to end and not even covered with a cloth; together with a kind of big "canterbury" littered with untidy papers, sets of documents, registers and pamphlets, and finally some thirty rush-seated chairs placed here and there over the floor and a couple of ragged arm-chairs usually reserved for the patients.

Doctor Bonamy at once hastened forward to greet Doctor Chassaigne, who was one of the latest and most glorious conquests of the Grotto. He found a chair for him and, bowing to Pierre's cassock, also

madé the young priest sit down. Then, in the tone of extreme politeness which was customary with him, he exclaimed: "*Mon cher confrère*, you will kindly allow me to continue. We were just examining mademoiselle."

He referred to a deaf peasant girl of twenty, who was seated in one of the arm-chairs. Instead of listening, however, Pierre, who was very weary, still with a buzzing in his head, contented himself with gazing at the scene, endeavouring to form some notion of the people assembled in the room. There were some fifty altogether, many of them standing and leaning against the walls. Half a dozen, however, were seated at the two tables, a central position being occupied by the superintendent of the piscinas, who was constantly consulting a thick register; whilst around him were a Father of the Assumption and three young seminarists who acted as secretaries, writing, searching for documents, passing them and classifying them again after each examination. Pierre, however, took most interest in a Father of the Immaculate Conception, Father Dargelès, who had been pointed out to him that morning as being the editor of the "Journal de la Grotte." This ecclesiastic, whose thin little face, with its blinking eyes, pointed nose, and delicate mouth was ever smiling, had modestly seated himself at the end of the lower table where he occasionally took notes for his newspaper. He alone, of the community to which he belonged, showed himself during the three days of the national pilgrimage. Behind him, however, one could divine the presence of all the others,

the slowly developed hidden power which organised everything and raked in all the proceeds.

The onlookers consisted almost entirely of inquisitive people and witnesses, including a score of doctors and a few priests. The medical men, who had come from all parts, mostly preserved silence, only a few of them occasionally venturing to ask a question ; and every now and then they would exchange oblique glances, more occupied apparently in watching one another than in verifying the facts submitted to their examination. Who could they be? Some names were mentioned, but they were quite unknown. Only one had caused any stir, that of a celebrated doctor, professor at a Catholic university.

That afternoon, however, Doctor Bonamy, who never sat down, busy as he was conducting the proceedings and questioning the patients, reserved most of his attentions for a short, fair-haired man, a writer of some talent who contributed to one of the most widely read Paris newspapers, and who, in the course of a holiday tour, had by chance reached Lourdes that morning. Was not this an unbeliever whom it might be possible to convert, whose influence it would be desirable to gain for advertisement's sake? Such at all events appeared to be M. Bonamy's opinion, for he had compelled the journalist to take the second arm-chair, and with an affectation of smiling good-nature was treating him to a full performance, again and again repeating that he and his patrons had nothing to hide, and that everything took place in the most open manner.

"We only desire light," he exclaimed. "We never cease to call for the investigations of all willing men."

Then, as the alleged cure of the deaf girl did not seem at all a promising case, he addressed her somewhat roughly: "Come, come, my girl, this is only a beginning. You must come back when there are more distinct signs of improvement." And turning to the journalist he added in an undertone: "If we were to believe them they would all be healed. But the only cures we accept are those which are thoroughly proven, which are as apparent as the sun itself. Pray notice moreover that I say cures and not miracles; for we doctors do not take upon ourselves to interpret and explain. We are simply here to see if the patients, who submit themselves to our examination, have really lost all symptoms of their ailments."

Thereupon he struck an attitude. Doubtless he spoke like this in order that his rectitude might not be called in question. Believing without believing, he knew that science was yet so obscure, so full of surprises, that what seemed impossible might always come to pass; and thus, in the declining years of his life, he had contrived to secure an exceptional position at the Grotto, a position which had both its inconveniences and its advantages, but which, taken for all in all, was very comfortable and pleasant.

And now, in reply to a question from the Paris journalist, he began to explain his mode of proceeding. Each patient who accompanied the pilgrimage arrived provided with papers, amongst which there

was almost always a certificate of the doctor who had been attending the case. At times even there were certificates given by several doctors, hospital bulletins and so forth—quite a record of the illness in its various stages. And thus if a cure took place and the cured person came forward, it was only necessary to consult his or her set of documents in order to ascertain the nature of the ailment, and then examination would show if that ailment had really disappeared.

Pierre was now listening. Since he had been there, seated and resting himself, he had grown calmer, and his mind was clear once more. It was only the heat which at present caused him any inconvenience. And thus, interested as he was by Doctor Bonamy's explanations, and desirous of forming an opinion, he would have spoken out and questioned, had it not been for his cloth which condemned him to remain in the background. He was delighted, therefore, when the little fair-haired gentleman, the influential writer, began to bring forward the objections which at once occurred to him.[1] Was it not most unfortunate that one doctor should diagnose the illness and that another one should verify the cure? In this mode of proceeding there was certainly a source of frequent error. The better plan would have been for a medical commission to examine all the patients as soon as they arrived at Lourdes and draw up reports on every case, to which

[1] The reader will doubtless have understood that the Parisian journalist is none other than M. Zola himself—*Trans.*

reports the same commission would have referred whenever an alleged cure was brought before it. Doctor Bonamy, however, did not fall in with this suggestion. He replied, with some reason, that a commission would never suffice for such gigantic labour. Just think of it! A thousand patients to examine in a single morning! And how many different theories there would be, how many contrary diagnoses, how many endless discussions, all of a nature to increase the general uncertainty! The preliminary examination of the patients, which was almost always impossible, would, even if attempted, leave the door open for as many errors as the present system. In practice, it was necessary to remain content with the certificates delivered by the medical men who had been in attendance on the patients, and these certificates accordingly acquired capital, decisive importance. Doctor Bonamy ran through the documents lying on one of the tables and gave the Paris journalist some of these certificates to read. A great many of them unfortunately were very brief. Others, more skilfully drawn up, clearly specified the nature of the complaint; and some of the doctors' signatures were even certified by the mayors of the localities where they resided. Nevertheless doubts remained, innumerable and not to be surmounted. Who were these doctors? Who could tell if they possessed sufficient scientific authority to write as they did? With all respect to the medical profession, were there not innumerable doctors whose attainments were very limited? And, besides, might not these have been influenced by circum-

stances that one knew nothing of, in some cases by considerations of a personal character? One was tempted to ask for an inquiry respecting each of these medical men. Since everything was based on the documents supplied by the patients, these documents ought to have been most carefully controlled; for there could be no proof of any miracle if the absolute certainty of the alleged ailments had not been demonstrated by stringent examination.

Very red and covered with perspiration, Doctor Bonamy waved his arms. "But that is the course we follow, that is the course we follow!" said he. "As soon as it seems to us that a case of cure cannot be explained by natural means, we institute a minute inquiry, we request the person who has been cured to return here for further examination. And as you can see, we surround ourselves with all means of enlightenment. These gentlemen here, who are listening to us, are nearly every one of them doctors who have come from all parts of France. We always entreat them to express their doubts if they feel any, to discuss the cases with us, and a very detailed report of each discussion is drawn up. You hear me, gentlemen; by all means protest if anything occurs here of a nature to offend your sense of truth."

Not one of the onlookers spoke. Most of the doctors present were undoubtedly Catholics, and naturally enough they merely bowed. As for the others, the unbelievers, the *savants* pure and simple, they looked on and evinced some interest in certain phenomena, but considerations of courtesy deterred them from entering into discussions which they knew

would have been useless. When as men of sense their discomfort became too great, and they felt themselves growing angry, they simply left the room.

As nobody breathed a word, Doctor Bonamy became quite triumphant, and on the journalist asking him if he were all alone to accomplish so much work, he replied: "Yes, all alone; but my functions as doctor of the Grotto are not so complicated as you may think, for, I repeat it, they simply consist in verifying cures whenever any take place." However, he corrected himself, and added with a smile: "Ah! I was forgetting, I am not quite alone, I have Raboin, who helps me to keep things a little bit in order here."

So saying, he pointed to a stout, grey-haired man of forty, with a heavy face and bull-dog jaw. Raboin was an ardent believer, one of those excited beings who did not allow the miracles to be called in question. And thus he often suffered from his duties at the Verification Office, where he was ever ready to growl with anger when anybody disputed a prodigy. The appeal to the doctors had made him quite lose his temper, and his superior had to calm him.

"Come, Raboin, my friend, be quiet!" said Doctor Bonamy. "All sincere opinions are entitled to a hearing."

However, the *défilé* of patients was resumed. A man was now brought in whose trunk was so covered with eczema that when he took off his shirt a kind of grey flour fell from his skin. He was not cured, but simply declared that he came to Lourdes

every year, and always went away feeling relieved. Then came a lady, a countess, who was fearfully emaciated, and whose story was an extraordinary one. Cured of tuberculosis by the Blessed Virgin, a first time, seven years previously, she had subsequently given birth to four children, and had then again fallen into consumption. At present she was a morphinomaniac, but her first bath had already relieved her so much, that she proposed taking part in the torchlight procession that same evening with the twenty-seven members of her family whom she had brought with her to Lourdes. Then there was a woman afflicted with nervous aphonia, who after months of absolute dumbness had just recovered her voice at the moment when the Blessed Sacrament went by at the head of the four o'clock procession.

"Gentlemen," declared Doctor Bonamy, affecting the graciousness of a *savant* of extremely liberal views, "as you are aware, we do not draw any conclusions when a nervous affection is in question. Still you will kindly observe that this woman was treated at the Salpêtrière for six months, and that she had to come here to find her tongue suddenly loosened."

Despite all these fine words he displayed some little impatience, for he would have greatly liked to show the gentleman from Paris one of those remarkable instances of cure which occasionally presented themselves during the four o'clock procession—that being the moment of grace and exaltation when the Blessed Virgin interceded for those whom she had chosen. But on this particular afternoon there had

apparently been none. The cures which had so far passed before them were doubtful ones, deficient in interest. Meanwhile, out-of-doors, you could hear the stamping and roaring of the crowd, goaded into a frenzy by repeated hymns, enfevered by its earnest desire for the Divine interposition, and growing more and more enervated by the delay.

All at once, however, a smiling, modest-looking young girl, whose clear eyes sparkled with intelligence, entered the office. "Ah!" exclaimed Doctor Bonamy joyously, "here is our little friend Sophie. A remarkable cure, gentlemen, which took place at the same season last year, and the results of which I will ask permission to show you."

Pierre had immediately recognized Sophie Couteau, the *miraculée* who had got into the train at Poitiers. And he now witnessed a repetition of the scene which had already been enacted in his presence. Doctor Bonamy began giving detailed explanations to the little fair-haired gentleman, who displayed great attention. The case, said the doctor, had been one of caries of the bones of the left heel, with a commencement of necrosis necessitating excision; and yet the frightful, suppurating sore had been healed in a minute at the first immersion in the piscina.

"Tell the gentlemen how it happened, Sophie," he added.

The little girl made her usual pretty gesture as a sign to everybody to be attentive. And then she began: "Well, it was like this; my foot was past cure, I could n't even go to church any more, and it

had to be kept bandaged because there was always a lot of matter coming from it. Monsieur Rivoire, the doctor, who had made a cut in it so as to see inside it, said that he should be obliged to take out a piece of the bone; and that, sure enough, would have made me lame for life. But when I got to Lourdes, and had prayed a great deal to the Blessed Virgin, I went to dip my foot in the water, wishing so much that I might be cured, that I did not even take the time to pull the bandages off. And everything remained in the water; there was no longer anything the matter with my foot when I took it out."

Doctor Bonamy listened, and punctuated each word with an approving nod. "And what did your doctor say, Sophie?" he asked.

"When I got back to Vivonne, and Monsieur Rivoire saw my foot again, he said: 'Whether it be God or the Devil who has cured this child, it is all the same to me; but in all truth, she *is* cured.'"

A burst of laughter rang out. The doctor's remark was sure to produce an effect.

"And what was it, Sophie, that you said to Madame la Comtesse, the superintendent of your ward?"

"Ah, yes! I had n't brought many bandages for my foot with me, and I said to her, 'It was very kind of the Blessed Virgin to cure me the first day, as I should have run out of linen on the morrow.'"

Then there was fresh laughter, a general display of satisfaction at seeing her look so pretty, telling her story, which she now knew by heart, in too recitative a manner, but, nevertheless, remaining very touching and truthful in appearance.

"Take off your shoe, Sophie," now said Doctor Bonamy; "show your foot to these gentlemen. Let them feel it. Nobody must retain any doubt."

The little foot promptly appeared, very white, very clean, carefully tended indeed, with its scar just below the ankle, a long scar, whose whity seam testified to the gravity of the complaint. Some of the medical men had drawn near, and looked on in silence. Others, whose opinions, no doubt, were already formed, did not disturb themseives, though one of them, with an air of extreme politeness, inquired why the Blessed Virgin had not made a new foot while she was about it, for this would assuredly have given her no more trouble. Doctor Bonamy, however, quickly replied, that if the Blessed Virgin had left a scar, it was certainly in order that a trace, a proof of the miracle, might remain. Then he entered into technical particulars, demonstrating that a fragment of bone and flesh must have been instantly formed, and this, of course, could not be explained in any natural way.

"*Mon Dieu!*" interrupted the little fair-haired gentleman, "there is no need of any such complicated affair. Let me merely see a finger cut with a penknife, let me see it dipped in the water, and let it come out with the cut cicatrised. The miracle will be quite as great, and I shall bow to it respectfully." Then he added: "If I possessed a source which could thus close up sores and wounds, I would turn the world topsy-turvy. I do not know exactly how I should manage it, but at all events I would summon the nations, and the nations would come. I

should cause the miracles to be verified in such an indisputable manner, that I should be the master of the earth. Just think what an extraordinary power it would be—a divine power. But it would be necessary that not a doubt should remain, the truth would have to be as patent, as apparent as the sun itself. The whole world would behold it and believe!"

Then he began discussing various methods of control with the doctor. He had admitted that, owing to the great number of patients, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to examine them all on their arrival. Only, why did n't they organise a special ward at the hospital, a ward which would be reserved for cases of visible sores? They would have thirty such cases all told, which might be subjected to the preliminary examination of a committee. Authentic reports would be drawn up, and the sores might even be photographed. Then, if a case of cure should present itself, the commission would merely have to authenticate it by a fresh report. And in all this there would be no question of any internal complaint, the diagnostication of which is difficult, and liable to be controverted. There would be visible evidence of the ailment, and cure could be proved.

Somewhat embarrassed, Doctor Bonamy replied: "No doubt, no doubt; all we ask for is enlightenment. The difficulty would lie in forming the committee you speak of. If you only knew how little medical men agree! However, there is certainly an idea in what you say."

Fortunately a fresh patient now came to his assistance. Whilst little Sophie Couteau, already forgotten, was putting on her shoes again, Elise Rouquet appeared, and, removing her wrap, displayed her diseased face to view. She related that she had been bathing it with her handkerchief ever since the morning, and it seemed to her that her sore, previously so fresh and raw, was already beginning to dry and grow paler in colour. This was true; Pierre noticed, with great surprise, that the aspect of the sore was now less horrible. This supplied fresh food for the discussion on visible sores, for the little fair-haired gentleman clung obstinately to his idea of organising a special ward. Indeed, said he, if the condition of this girl had been verified that morning, and she should be cured, what a triumph it would have been for the Grotto, which could have claimed to have healed a lupus! It would then have no longer been possible to deny that miracles were worked.

Doctor Chassaigne had so far kept in the background, motionless and silent, as though he desired that the facts alone should exercise their influence on Pierre. But he now leant forward and said to him in an undertone: "Visible sores, visible sores indeed! That gentleman can have no idea that our most learned medical men suspect many of these sores to be of nervous origin. Yes, we are discovering that complaints of this kind are often simply due to bad nutrition of the skin. These questions of nutrition are still so imperfectly studied and understood! And some medical men are also beginning

to prove that the faith which heals can even cure sores, certain forms of lupus among others. And so I would ask what certainty that gentleman would obtain with his ward for visible sores? There would simply be a little more confusion and passion in arguing the eternal question. No, no! Science is vain, it is a sea of uncertainty."

He smiled sorrowfully whilst Doctor Bonamy, after advising Elise Rouquet to continue using the water as lotion and to return each day for further examination, repeated with his prudent, affable air: "At all events, gentlemen, there are signs of improvement in this case—that is beyond doubt."

But all at once the office was fairly turned topsy-turvy by the arrival of La Grivotte, who swept in like a whirlwind, almost dancing with delight and shouting in a full voice: "I am cured! I am cured!"

And forthwith she began to relate that they had first of all refused to bathe her, and that she had been obliged to insist and beg and sob in order to prevail upon them to do so, after receiving Father Fourcade's express permission. And then it had all happened as she had previously said it would. She had not been immersed in the icy water for three minutes—all perspiring as she was with her consumptive rattle—before she had felt strength returning to her like a whipstroke lashing her whole body. And now a flaming excitement possessed her; radiant, stamping her feet, she was unable to keep still.

"I am cured, my good gentlemen, I am cured!"

Pierre looked at her, this time quite stupefied. Was this the same girl whom, on the previous night, he had seen lying on the carriage seat, annihilated, coughing and spitting blood, with her face of ashen hue? He could not recognise her as she now stood there, erect and slender, her cheeks rosy, her eyes sparkling, upbuoyed by a determination to live, a joy in living already.

"Gentlemen," declared Doctor Bonamy, "the case appears to me to be a very interesting one. We will see."

Then he asked for the documents concerning La Grivotte. But they could not be found among all the papers heaped together on the tables. The young seminarists who acted as secretaries began turning everything over; and the superintendent of the piscinas who sat in their midst himself had to get up to see if these documents were in the "canterbury." At last, when he had sat down again, he found them under the register which lay open before him. Among them were three medical certificates which he read aloud. All three of them agreed in stating that the case was one of advanced phthisis, complicated by nervous incidents which invested it with a peculiar character.

Doctor Bonamy wagged his head as though to say that such an *ensemble* of testimony could leave no room for doubt. Forthwith, he subjected the patient to a prolonged auscultation. And he murmured: "I hear nothing—I hear nothing." Then, correcting himself, he added: "At least I hear scarcely anything."

Finally he turned towards the five-and-twenty or thirty doctors who were assembled there in silence. "Will some of you gentlemen," he asked, "kindly lend me the help of your science? We are here to study and discuss these questions."

At first nobody stirred. Then there was one who ventured to come forward and in his turn subject the patient to auscultation. But instead of declaring himself, he continued reflecting, shaking his head anxiously. At last he stammered that in his opinion one must await further developments. Another doctor, however, at once took his place, and this one expressed a decided opinion. He could hear nothing at all, that woman could never have suffered from phthisis. Then others followed him; in fact, with the exception of five or six whose smiling faces remained impenetrable, they all joined the *défilé*. And the confusion now attained its apogee; for each gave an opinion sensibly differing from that of his colleagues, so that a general uproar arose and one could no longer hear oneself speak. Father Dargelès alone retained the calmness of perfect serenity, for he had scented one of those cases which impassion people and redound to the glory of Our Lady of Lourdes. He was already taking notes on a corner of the table.

Thanks to all the noise of the discussion, Pierre and Doctor Chassaigne, seated at some distance from the others, were now able to talk together without being heard. "Oh! those piscinas!" said the young priest, "I have just seen them. To think that the water should be so seldom changed! What filth it is, what a soup of microbes! What a terrible

blow for the present-day mania, that rage for antiseptic precautions! How is it that some pestilence does not carry off all these poor people? The opponents of the microbe theory must be having a good laugh——"

M. Chassaigne stopped him. "No, no, my child," said he. "The baths may be scarcely clean, but they offer no danger. Please notice that the temperature of the water never rises above fifty degrees, and that seventy-seven are necessary for the cultivation of germs.[1] Besides, scarcely any contagious diseases come to Lourdes, neither cholera, nor typhus, nor variola, nor measles, nor scarlatina. We only see certain organic affections here, paralysis, scrofula, tumours, ulcers and abscesses, cancers and phthisis; and the latter cannot be transmitted by the water of the baths. The old sores which are bathed have nothing to fear, and offer no risk of contagion. I can assure you that on this point there is even no necessity for the Blessed Virgin to intervene."

"Then, in that case, doctor," rejoined Pierre, "when you were practising, you would have dipped all your patients in icy water—women at no matter what season, rheumatic patients, people suffering from diseases of the heart, consumptives, and so on? For instance, that unhappy girl, half dead, and covered with sweat—would you have bathed her?"

"Certainly not! There are heroic methods of treatment to which, in practice, one does not dare to

[1] The above are Fahrenheit degrees.—*Trans.*

have recourse. An icy bath may undoubtedly kill a consumptive; but do we know, whether, in certain circumstances, it might not save her? I, who have ended by admitting that a supernatural power is at work here, I willingly admit that some cures must take place under natural conditions, thanks to that immersion in cold water which seems to us idiotic and barbarous. Ah! the things we don't know, the things we don't know!"

He was relapsing into his anger, his hatred of science, which he scorned since it had left him scared and powerless beside the deathbed of his wife and his daughter. "You ask for certainties," he resumed, "but assuredly it is not medicine which will give you them. Listen for a moment to those gentlemen and you will be edified. Is it not beautiful, all that confusion in which so many opinions clash together? Certainly there are ailments with which one is thoroughly acquainted, even to the most minute details of their evolution; there are remedies also, the effects of which have been studied with the most scrupulous care; but the thing that one does not know, that one cannot know, is the relation of the remedy to the ailment, for there are as many cases as there may be patients, each liable to variation, so that experimentation begins afresh every time. This is why the practice of medicine remains an art, for there can be no experimental finality in it. Cure always depends on chance, on some fortunate circumstance, on some bright idea of the doctor's. And so you will understand that all the people who come and discuss here make me laugh

when they talk about the absolute laws of science. Where are those laws in medicine? I should like to have them shown to me."

He did not wish to say any more, but his passion carried him away, so he went on: "I told you that I had become a believer—nevertheless, to speak the truth, I understand very well why this worthy Doctor Bonamy is so little affected, and why he continues calling upon doctors in all parts of the world to come and study his miracles. The more doctors that might come, the less likelihood there would be of the truth being established in the inevitable battle between contradictory diagnoses and methods of treatment. If men cannot agree about a visible sore, they surely cannot do so about an internal lesion the existence of which will be admitted by some, and denied by others. And why then should not everything become a miracle? For, after all, whether the action comes from nature or from some unknown power, medical men are, as a rule, none the less astonished when an illness terminates in a manner which they have not foreseen. No doubt, too, things are very badly organised here. Those certificates from doctors whom nobody knows have no real value. All documents ought to be stringently inquired into. But even admitting any absolute scientific strictness, you must be very simple, my dear child, if you imagine that a positive conviction would be arrived at, absolute for one and all. Error is implanted in man, and there is no more difficult task than that of demonstrating to universal satisfaction the most insignificant truth."

Pierre had now begun to understand what was taking place at Lourdes, the extraordinary spectacle which the world had been witnessing for years, amidst the reverent admiration of some and the insulting laughter of others. Forces as yet but imperfectly studied, of which one was even ignorant, were certainly at work—auto-suggestion, long prepared disturbance of the nerves; inspiriting influence of the journey, the prayers, and the hymns; and especially the healing breath, the unknown force which was evolved from the multitude, in the acute crisis of faith. Thus it seemed to him anything but intelligent to believe in trickery. The facts were both of a much more lofty and much more simple nature. There was no occasion for the Fathers of the Grotto to descend to falsehood; it was sufficient that they should help in creating confusion, that they should utilise the universal ignorance. It might even be admitted that everybody acted in good faith—the doctors void of genius who delivered the certificates, the consoled patients who believed themselves cured, and the impassioned witnesses who swore that they had beheld what they described. And from all this was evolved the obvious impossibility of proving whether there was a miracle or not. And such being the case, did not the miracle naturally become a reality for the greater number, for all those who suffered and who had need of hope?

Then, as Doctor Bonamy, who had noticed that they were chatting apart, came up to them, Pierre ventured to inquire: "What is about the proportion of the cures to the number of cases?"

"About ten per cent.," answered the doctor; and reading in the young priest's eyes the words that he could not utter, he added in a very cordial way: "Oh! there would be many more, they would all be cured if we chose to listen to them. But it is as well to say it, I am only here to keep an eye on the miracles, like a policeman as it were. My only functions are to check excessive zeal, and to prevent holy things from being made ridiculous. In one word, this office is simply an office where a *visa* is given when the cures have been verified and seem real ones."

He was interrupted, however, by a low growl. Raboin was growing angry: "The cures verified, the cures verified," he muttered. "What is the use of that? There is no pause in the working of the miracles. What is the use of verifying them so far as believers are concerned? *They* merely have to bow down and believe. And what is the use, too, as regards the unbelievers? *They* will never be convinced. The work we do here is so much foolishness."

Doctor Bonamy severely ordered him to hold his tongue, "You are a rebel, Raboin," said he; "I shall tell Father Capdebarthe that I won't have you here any longer since you pass your time in sowing disobedience."

Nevertheless, there was truth in what had just been said by this man, who so promptly showed his teeth, eager to bite whenever his faith was assailed; and Pierre looked at him with sympathy. All the work of the Verification Office—work anything but

well performed—was indeed useless, for it wounded the feelings of the pious, and failed to satisfy the incredulous. Besides, can a miracle be proved? No, you must believe in it! When God is pleased to intervene, it is not for man to try to understand. In the ages of real belief, Science did not make any meddlesome attempt to explain the nature of the Divinity. And why should it come and interfere here? By doing so, it simply hampered faith and diminished its own prestige. No, no, there must be no Science, you must throw youself upon the ground, kiss it, and believe. Or else you must take yourself off. No compromise was possible. If examination once began it must go on, and must, fatally, conduct to doubt.

Pierre's greatest sufferings, however, came from the extraordinary conversations which he heard around him. There were some believers present who spoke of the miracles with the most amazing ease and tranquillity. The most stupefying stories left their serenity entire. Another miracle, and yet another! And with smiles on their faces, their reason never protesting, they went on relating such imaginings as could only have come from diseased brains. They were evidently living in such a state of visionary fever that nothing henceforth could astonish them. And not only did Pierre notice this among folks of simple, childish minds, illiterate, hallucinated creatures like Raboin, but also among the men of intellect, the men with cultivated brains, the *savants* like Doctor Bonamy and others. It was incredible. And thus Pierre felt a growing discom-

fort arising within him, a covert anger which would doubtless end by bursting forth. His reason was struggling, like that of some poor wretch who after being flung into a river, feels the waters seize him from all sides and stifle him ; and he reflected that the minds which, like Doctor Chassaigne's, sink at last into blind belief, must pass though this same discomfort and struggle before the final shipwreck.

He glanced at his old friend and saw how sorrowful he looked, struck down by destiny, as weak as a crying child, and henceforth quite alone in life. Nevertheless, he was unable to check the cry of protest which rose to his lips : " No, no, if we do not know everything, even if we shall never know everything, there is no reason why we should leave off learning. It is wrong that the Unknown should profit by man's debility and ignorance. On the contrary, the eternal hope should be that the things which now seem inexplicable will some day be explained ; and we cannot, under healthy conditions, have any other ideal than this march towards the discovery of the Unknown, this victory slowly achieved by reason amidst all the miseries both of the flesh and of the mind. Ah ! reason—it is my reason which makes me suffer, and it is from my reason too that I await all my strength. When reason dies, the whole being perishes. And I feel but an ardent thirst to satisfy my reason more and more, even though I may lose all happiness in doing so."

Tears were appearing in Doctor Chassaigne's eyes ; doubtless the memory of his dear dead ones had again flashed upon him. And, in his turn, he

murmured: "Reason, reason, yes, certainly it is a thing to be very proud of; it embodies the very dignity of life. But there is love, which is life's omnipotence, the one blessing to be won again when you have lost it."

His voice sank in a stifled sob; and as in a mechanical way he began to finger the sets of documents lying on the table, he espied among them one whose cover bore the name of Marie de Guersaint in large letters. He opened it and read the certificates of the two doctors who had inferred that the case was one of paralysis of the marrow. "Come, my child," he then resumed, "I know that you feel warm affection for Mademoiselle de Guersaint. What should you say if she were cured here? There are here some certificates, bearing honourable names, and you know that paralysis of this nature is virtually incurable. Well, if this young person should all at once run and jump about as I have seen so many others do, would you not feel very happy, would you not at last acknowledge the intervention of a supernatural power?"

Pierre was about to reply, when he suddenly remembered his cousin Beauclair's expression of opinion, the prediction that the miracle would come about like a lightning stroke, an awakening, an exaltation of the whole being; and he felt his discomfort increase and contented himself with replying: "Yes, indeed, I should be very happy. And you are right; there is doubtless only a determination to secure happiness in all the agitation one beholds here."

However, he could remain in that office no longer. The heat was becoming so great that perspiration streamed down the faces of those present. Doctor Bonamy had begun to dictate a report of the examination of La Grivotte to one of the seminarists, while Father Dargelès, watchful with regard to the phraseology employed, occasionally rose and whispered some verbal alteration in the writer's ear. Meantime, the tumult around them was continuing; the discussion among the medical men had taken another turn and now bore on certain technical points of no significance with regard to the case in question. You could no longer breathe within those wooden walls, nausea was upsetting every heart and every head. The little fair-haired gentleman, the influential writer from Paris, had already gone away, quite vexed at not having seen a real miracle.

Pierre thereupon said to Doctor Chassaigne, "Let us go; I shall be taken ill if I stay here any longer."

They left the office at the same time as La Grivotte, who was at last being dismissed. And as soon as they reached the door they found themselves caught in a torrential, surging, jostling crowd, which was eager to behold the girl so miraculously healed; for the report of the miracle must have already spread, and one and all were struggling to see the chosen one, question her, and touch her. And she, with her empurpled cheeks, her flaming eyes, her dancing gait, could do nothing but repeat, "I am cured, I am cured!"

Shouts drowned her voice, she herself was submerged, carried off amidst the eddies of the throng.

For a moment one lost sight of her as though she had sunk in those tumultuous waters ; then she suddenly reappeared close to Pierre and the doctor, who endeavoured to extricate her from the crush. They had just perceived the Commander, one of whose manias was to come down to the piscinas and the Grotto in order to vent his anger there. With his frock-coat tightly girding him in military fashion, he was, as usual, leaning on his silver-knobbed walking-stick, slightly dragging his left leg, which his second attack of paralysis had stiffened. And his face reddened and his eyes flashed with anger when La Grivotte, pushing him aside in order that she might pass, repeated amidst the wild enthusiasm of the crowd, " I am cured, I am cured ! "

" Well! " he cried, seized with sudden fury, " so much the worse for you, my girl ! "

Exclamations arose, folks began to laugh, for he was well known, and his maniacal passion for death was forgiven him. However, when he began stammering confused words, saying that it was pitiful to desire life when one was possessed of neither beauty nor fortune, and that this girl ought to have preferred to die at once rather than suffer again, people began to growl around him, and Abbé Judaine, who was passing, had to extricate him from his trouble. The priest drew him away. " Be quiet, my friend, be quiet," he said. " It is scandalous. Why do you rebel like this against the goodness of God who occasionally shows His compassion for our sufferings by alleviating them ? I tell you again that you yourself ought to fall on your knees and beg Him to

restore to you the use of your leg and let you live another ten years."

The Commander almost choked with anger. "What!" he replied, "ask to live for another ten years, when my finest day will be the day I die! Show myself as spiritless, as cowardly as the thousands of patients whom I see pass along here, full of a base terror of death, shrieking aloud their weakness, their passion to remain alive! Ah! no, I should feel too much contempt for myself. I want to die!—to die at once! It will be so delightful to be no more."

He was at last out of the scramble of the pilgrims, and again found himself near Doctor Chassaigne and Pierre on the bank of the Gave. And he addressed himself to the doctor, whom he often met: "Did n't they try to restore a dead man to life just now?" he asked; "I was told of it—it almost suffocated me. Eh, doctor? You understand? That man was happy enough to be dead, and they dared to dip him in their water in the criminal hope to make him alive again! But suppose they had succeeded, suppose their water had animated that poor devil once more—for one never knows what may happen in this funny world—don't you think that the man would have had a perfect right to spit his anger in the face of those corpse-menders? Had he asked them to awaken him? How did they know if he were not well pleased at being dead? Folks ought to be consulted at any rate. Just picture them playing the same vile trick on me when I at last fall into the great deep sleep. Ah! I would give them a nice

reception. 'Meddle with what concerns you,' I should say, and you may be sure I should make all haste to die again!"

He looked so singular in the fit of rage which had come over him that Abbé Judaine and the doctor could not help smiling. Pierre, however, remained grave, chilled by the great quiver which swept by. Were not those words he had just heard the despairing imprecations of Lazarus? He had often imagined Lazarus emerging from the tomb and crying aloud: "Why hast Thou again awakened me to this abominable life, O Lord? I was sleeping the eternal, dreamless sleep so deeply; I was at last enjoying such sweet repose amidst the delights of nihility! I had known every wretchedness and every dolour, treachery, vain hope, defeat, sickness; as one of the living I had paid my frightful debt to suffering, for I was born without knowing why, and I lived without knowing how; and now, behold, O Lord, Thou requirest me to pay my debt yet again; Thou condemnest me to serve my term of punishment afresh! Have I then been guilty of some inexpiable transgression that thou shouldst inflict such cruel chastisement upon me? Alas! to live again, to feel oneself die a little in one's flesh each day, to have no intelligence save such as is required in order to doubt; no will, save such as one must have to be unable; no tenderness, save such as is needed to weep over one's own sorrows. Yet it was passed, I had crossed the terrifying threshold of death, I had known that second which is so horrible that it sufficeth to poison the whole of life. I had felt the sweat of agony

cover me with moisture, the blood flow back from my limbs, my breath forsake me, flee away in a last gasp. And Thou ordainest that I should know this distress a second time, that I should die twice, that my human misery should exceed that of all mankind. Then may it be even now, O Lord! Yes, I entreat Thee, do also this great miracle; may I once more lay myself down in this grave, and again fall asleep without suffering from the interruption of my eternal slumber. Have mercy upon me, and forbear from inflicting on me the torture of living yet again; that torture which is so frightful that Thou hast never inflicted it on any being. I have always loved Thee and served Thee; and I beseech Thee do not make of me the greatest example of Thy wrath, a cause of terror unto all generations. But show unto me Thy gentleness and loving kindness, O Lord! restore unto me the slumber I have earned, and let me sleep once more amid the delights of Thy nihility."

While Pierre was pondering in this wise, Abbé Judaine had led the Commander away, at last managing to calm him; and now the young priest shook hands with Doctor Chassaigne, recollecting that it was past five o'clock, and that Marie must be waiting for him. On his way back to the Grotto, however, he encountered the Abbé des Hermoises deep in conversation with M. de Guersaint, who had only just left his room at the hotel, and was quite enlivened by his good nap. He and his companion were admiring the extraordinary beauty which the fervour of faith imparted to some women's counte-

nances, and they also spoke of their projected trip to the Cirque de Gavarnie.

On learning, however, that Marie had taken a first bath with no effect, M. de Guersaint at once followed Pierre. They found the poor girl still in the same painful stupor, with her eyes still fixed on the Blessed Virgin who had not deigned to hear her. She did not answer the loving words which her father addressed to her, but simply glanced at him with her large distressful eyes, and then again turned them upon the marble statue which looked so white amid the radiance of the tapers. And whilst Pierre stood waiting to take her back to the hospital, M. de Guersaint devoutly fell upon his knees. At first he prayed with passionate ardour for his daughter's cure, and then he solicited, on his own behalf, the favour of finding some wealthy person who would provide him with the million francs that he needed for his studies on aërial navigation.

V

BERNADETTE'S TRIALS

ABOUT eleven o'clock that night, leaving M. de Guersaint in his room at the Hotel of the Apparitions, it occurred to Pierre to return for a moment to the Hospital of Our Lady of Dolours before going to bed himself. He had left Marie in such a despairing state, so fiercely silent, that he was full of anxiety about her. And when he had asked for Madame de Jonquière at the door of the Sainte-Honorine Ward he became yet more anxious, for the news was by no means good. The young girl, said the superintendent, had not even opened her mouth. She would answer nobody, and had even refused to eat. Madame de Jonquiè, insisted therefore that Pierre should come in. True, the presence of men was forbidden in the women's wards at night-time, but then a priest is not a man.

"She only cares for you and will only listen to you," said the worthy lady. "Pray come in and sit down near her till Abbé Judaine arrives. He will come at about one in the morning to administer the communion to our more afflicted sufferers, those who cannot move and who have to eat at daybreak. You will be able to assist him."

Pierre thereupon followed Madame de Jonquière, who installed him at the head of Marie's bed. "My dear child," she said to the girl, "I have brought you somebody who is very fond of you. You will be able to chat with him, and you will be reasonable now, won't you?"

Marie, however, on recognising Pierre, gazed at him with an air of exasperated suffering, a black, stern expression of revolt.

"Would you like him to read something to you," resumed Madame de Jonquière, "something that would ease and console you as he did in the train? No? It would n't interest you, you don't care for it? Well, we will see by-and-by. I will leave him with you, and I am sure you will be quite reasonable again in a few minutes."

Pierre then began speaking to her in a low voice, saying all the kind consoling things that his heart could think of, and entreating her not to allow herself to sink into such despair. If the Blessed Virgin had not cured her on the first day, it was because she reserved her for some conspicuous miracle. But he spoke in vain. Marie had turned her head away, and did not even seem to listen as she lay there with a bitter expression on her mouth and a gleam of irritation in her eyes, which wandered away into space. Accordingly he ceased speaking and began to gaze at the ward around him.

The spectacle was a frightful one. Never before had such a nausea of pity and terror affected his heart. They had long since dined, nevertheless plates of food which had been brought up from the

kitchens still lay about the beds; and all through the night there were some who ate whilst others continued restlessly moaning; asking to be turned over or helped out of bed. As the hours went by a kind of vague delirium seemed to come upon almost all of them. Very few were able to sleep quietly. Some had been undressed and were lying between the sheets, but the greater number were simply stretched out on the beds, it being so difficult to get their clothes off that they did not even change their linen during the five days of the pilgrimage. In the semi-obscurity, moreover, the obstruction of the ward seemed to have increased. To the fifteen beds ranged along the walls and the seven mattresses filling the central space, some fresh pallets had been added, and on all sides there was a confused litter of ragged garments, old baskets, boxes, and valises. Indeed, you no longer knew where to step. Two smoky lanterns shed but a dim light upon this encampment of dying women, in which a sickly smell prevailed; for, instead of any freshness, merely the heavy heat of the August night came in through the two windows which had been left ajar. Nightmare-like shadows and cries sped to and fro, peopling the inferno, amidst the nocturnal agony of so much accumulated suffering.

However, Pierre recognised Raymonde, who, her duties over, had come to kiss her mother, before going to sleep in one of the garrets reserved to the Sisters of the hospital. For her own part, Madame de Jonquière, taking her functions to heart, did not close her eyes during the three nights spent at Lourdes.

She certainly had an arm-chair in which to rest herself, but she never sat down in it for a moment without being disturbed. It must be admitted that she was bravely seconded by little Madame Désagneaux, who displayed such enthusiastic zeal that Sister Hyacinthe asked her, with a smile: "Why don't you take the vows?" whereupon she responded, with an air of scared surprise: "Oh! I can't, I 'm married, you know, and I 'm very fond of my husband." As for Madame Volmar, she had not even shown herself; but it was alleged that Madame de Jonquière had sent her to bed on hearing her complain of a frightful headache. And this had put Madame Désagneaux in quite a temper; for, as she sensibly enough remarked, a person had no business to offer to nurse the sick when the slightest exertion exhausted her. She herself, however, at last began to feel her legs and arms aching, though she would not admit it, but hastened to every patient whom she heard calling, ever ready as she was to lend a helping hand. In Paris she would have rung for a servant rather than have moved a candlestick herself; but here she was ever coming and going, bringing and emptying basins, and passing her arms around patients to hold them up, whilst Madame de Jonquière slipped pillows behind them. However, shortly after eleven o'clock, she was all at once overpowered. Having imprudently stretched herself in the arm-chair for a moment's rest, she there fell soundly asleep, her pretty head sinking on one of her shoulders amidst her lovely, wavy fair hair, which was all in disorder. And from that moment neither moan

nor call, indeed no sound whatever, could waken her.

Madame de Jonquière, however, had softly approached the young priest again. "I had an idea," said she in a low voice, "of sending for Monsieur Ferrand, the house-surgeon, you know, who accompanies us. He would have given the poor girl something to calm her. Only he is busy downstairs trying to relieve Brother Isidore, in the Family Ward. Besides, as you know, we are not supposed to give medical attendance here; our work consists in placing our dear sick ones in the hands of the Blessed Virgin."

Sister Hyacinthe, who had made up her mind to spend the night with the superintendent, now drew near. "I have just come from the Family Ward," she said; "I went to take Monsieur Sabathier some oranges which I had promised him, and I saw Monsieur Ferrand, who had just succeeded in reviving Brother Isidore. Would you like me to go down and fetch him?"

But Pierre declined the offer. "No, no," he replied, "Marie will be sensible. I will read her a few consoling pages by-and-by, and then she will rest."

For the moment, however, the girl still remained obstinately silent. One of the two lanterns was hanging from the wall close by, and Pierre could distinctly see her thin face, rigid and motionless like stone. Then, farther away, in the adjoining bed, he perceived Élise Rouquet, who was sound asleep and no longer wore her fichu, but openly displayed her face,

the ulcerations of which still continued to grow paler. And on the young priest's left hand was Madame Vêtu, now greatly weakened, in a hopeless state, unable to doze off for a moment, shaken as she was by a continuous rattle. He said a few kind words to her, for which she thanked him with a nod; and, gathering her remaining strength together, she was at last able to say: "There were several cures to-day; I was very pleased to hear of them."

On a mattress at the foot of her bed was La Grivotte, who in a fever of extraordinary activity kept on sitting up to repeat her favourite phrase: "I am cured, I am cured!" And she went on to relate that she had eaten half a fowl for dinner, she who had been unable to eat for long months past. Then, too, she had followed the torchlight procession on foot during nearly a couple of hours, and she would certainly have danced till daybreak had the Blessed Virgin only been pleased to give a ball. And once more she repeated: "I am cured, yes, cured, quite cured!"

Thereupon Madame Vêtu found enough strength to say with childlike serenity and perfect, gladsome abnegation: "The Blessed Virgin did well to cure her since she is poor. I am better pleased than if it had been myself, for I have my little shop to depend upon and can wait. We each have our turn, each our turn."

One and all displayed a like charity, a like pleasure that others should have been cured. Seldom, indeed, was any jealousy shown; they surrendered themselves to a kind of epidemical beatitude, to a

contagious hope that they would all be cured whenever it should so please the Blessed Virgin. And it was necessary that she should not be offended by any undue impatience ; for assuredly she had her reasons and knew right well why she began by healing some rather than others. Thus with the fraternity born of common suffering and hope, the most grievously afflicted patients prayed for the cure of their neighbours. None of them ever despaired, each fresh miracle was the promise of another one, of the one which would be worked on themselves. Their faith remained unshakable. A story was told of a paralytic woman, some farm servant, who with extraordinary strength of will had contrived to take a few steps at the Grotto, and who while being conveyed back to the hospital had asked to be set down that she might return to the Grotto on foot. But she had gone only half the distance when she had staggered, panting and livid ; and on being brought to the hospital on a stretcher, she had died there, cured, however, said her neighbours in the ward. Each, indeed, had her turn ; the Blessed Virgin forgot none of her dear daughters unless it were her design to grant some chosen one immediate admission into Paradise.

All at once, at the moment when Pierre was leaning towards her, again offering to read to her, Marie burst into furious sobs. Letting her head fall upon her friend's shoulder, she vented all her rebellion in a low, terrible voice, amidst the vague shadows of that awful room. She had experienced what seldom happened to her, a collapse of faith, a sudden loss of

courage, all the rage of the suffering being who can no longer wait. Such was her despair, indeed, that she even became sacrilegious.

"No, no," she stammered, "the Virgin is cruel; she is unjust, for she did not cure me just now. Yet I felt so certain that she would grant my prayer, I had prayed to her so fervently. I shall never be cured, now that the first day is past. It was a Saturday, and I was convinced that I should be cured on a Saturday. I did not want to speak—and oh! prevent me, for my heart is too full, and I might say more than I ought to do."

With fraternal hands he had quickly taken hold of her head, and he was endeavouring to stifle the cry of her rebellion. "Be quiet, Marie, I entreat you! It would never do for anyone to hear you—you so pious! Do you want to scandalise every soul?"

But in spite of her efforts she was unable to keep silence. "I should stifle, I must speak out," she said. "I no longer love her, no longer believe in her. The tales which are related here are all falsehoods; there is *nothing*, she does not even exist, since she does not hear when one speaks to her, and sobs. If you only knew all that I said to her! Oh! I want to go away at once. Take me away, carry me away in your arms, so that I may go and die in the street, where the passers-by, at least, will take pity on my sufferings!"

She was growing weak again, and had once more fallen on her back, stammering, talking childishly. "Besides, nobody loves me," she said. "My father

was not even there. And you, my friend, forsook me. When I saw that it was another who was taking me to the piscinas, I began to feel a chill. Yes, that chill of doubt which I often felt in Paris. And that is at least certain, I doubted—perhaps, indeed, that is why she did not cure me. I cannot have prayed well enough, I am not pious enough, no doubt."

She was no longer blaspheming, but seeking for excuses to explain the non-intervention of Heaven. However, her face retained an angry expression amidst this struggle which she was waging with the Supreme Power, that Power which she had loved so well and entreated so fervently, but which had not obeyed her. When, on rare occasions, a fit of rage of this description broke out in the ward, and the sufferers, lying on their beds, rebelled against their fate, sobbing and lamenting, and at times even swearing, the lady-hospitallers and the Sisters, somewhat shocked, would content themselves with simply closing the bed-curtains. Grace had departed, one must await its return. And at last, sometimes after long hours, the rebellious complaints would die away, and peace would reign again amidst the deep, woeful silence.

"Calm yourself, calm yourself, I implore you," Pierre gently repeated to Marie, seeing that a fresh attack was coming upon her, an attack of doubt in herself, of fear that she was unworthy of the divine assistance.

Sister Hyacinthe, moreover, had again drawn near. "You will not be able to take the sacrament

by-and-by, my dear child," said she, "if you continue in such a state. Come, since we have given Monsieur l'Abbé permission to read to you, why don't you let him do so?"

Marie made a feeble gesture as though to say that she consented, and Pierre at once took out of the valise at the foot of her bed, the little blue-covered book in which the story of Bernadette was so naïvely related. As on the previous night, however, when the train was rolling on, he did not confine himself to the bald phraseology of the book, but began improvising, relating all manner of details in his own fashion, in order to charm the simple folks who listened to him. Nevertheless, with his reasoning, analytical proclivities, he could not prevent himself from secretly re-establishing the real facts, imparting, for himself alone, a human character to this legend, whose wealth of prodigies contributed so greatly to the cure of those that suffered. Women were soon sitting up on all the surrounding beds. They wished to hear the continuation of the story, for the thought of the sacrament which they were passionately awaiting had prevented almost all of them from getting to sleep. And seated there, in the pale light of the lantern hanging from the wall above him, Pierre little by little raised his voice, so that he might be heard by the whole ward.

"The persecutions began with the very first miracles. Called a liar and a lunatic, Bernadette was threatened with imprisonment. Abbé Peyramale, the parish priest of Lourdes, and Monseigneur Laurence, Bishop of Tarbes, like the rest of the

clergy, refrained from all intervention, waiting the course of events with the greatest prudence; whilst the civil authorities, the Prefect, the Public Prosecutor, the Mayor, and the Commissary of Police, indulged in excessive anti-religious zeal."

Continuing his perusal in this fashion, Pierre saw the real story rise up before him with invincible force. His mind travelled a short distance backward and he beheld Bernadette at the time of the first apparitions, so candid, so charming in her ignorance and good faith, amidst all her sufferings. And she was truly the visionary, the saint, her face assuming an expression of superhuman beauty during her crises of ecstasy. Her brow beamed, her features seemed to ascend, her eyes were bathed with light, whilst her parted lips burnt with divine love. And then her whole person became majestic; it was in a slow, stately way that she made the sign of the cross, with gestures which seemed to embrace the whole horizon. The neighbouring valleys, the villages, the towns, spoke of Bernadette alone. Although the Lady had not yet told her name, she was recognised, and people said, "It is she, the Blessed Virgin." On the first market-day, so many people flocked into Lourdes that the town quite overflowed. All wished to see the blessed child whom the Queen of the Angels had chosen, and who became so beautiful when the heavens opened to her enraptured gaze. The crowd on the banks of the Gave grew larger each morning, and thousands of people ended by installing themselves there, jostling one another that they might lose nothing of the spectacle! As soon as Bernadette

appeared, a murmur of fervour spread: "Here is the saint, the saint, the saint!" Folks rushed forward to kiss her garments. She was a Messiah, the eternal Messiah whom the nations await, and the need of whom is ever arising from generation to generation. And, moreover, it was ever the same adventure beginning afresh: an apparition of the Virgin to a shepherdess; a voice exhorting the world to penitence; a spring gushing forth; and miracles astonishing and enrapturing the crowds that hastened to the spot in larger and larger numbers.

Ah! those first miracles of Lourdes, what a spring-tide flowering of consolation and hope they brought to the hearts of the wretched, upon whom poverty and sickness were preying! Old Bourriette's restored eyesight, little Bouhohort's resuscitation in the icy water, the deaf recovering their hearing, the lame suddenly enabled to walk, and so many other cases, Blaise Maumus, Bernade Soubies,[1] Auguste Bordes, Blaisette Soupenne, Benoîte Cazeaux, in turn cured of the most dreadful ailments, became the subject of endless conversations, and fanned the illusions of all those who suffered either in their hearts or their flesh. On Thursday, March 4th, the last day of the fifteen visits solicited by the Virgin, there were more than twenty thousand persons assembled before the Grotto. Everybody, indeed, had come down from the mountains. And this immense throng found at

[1] I give this name as written by M. Zola; but in other works on Lourdes I find it given as "Bernarde Loubie—a bed-ridden old woman, cured of a paralytic affection by drinking the water of the Grotto."—*Trans.*

the Grotto the divine food that it hungered for, a feast of the Marvellous, a sufficient meed of the Impossible to content its belief in a superior Power, which deigned to bestow some attention upon poor folks, and to intervene in the wretched affairs of this lower world, in order to re-establish some measure of justice and kindness. It was indeed the cry of heavenly charity bursting forth, the invisible helping hand stretched out at last to dress the eternal sores of humanity. Ah! that dream in which each successive generation sought refuge, with what indestructible energy did it not arise among the disinherited ones of this world as soon as it found a favourable spot, prepared by circumstances! And for centuries, perhaps, circumstances had never so combined to kindle the mystical fire of faith as they did at Lourdes.

A new religion was about to be founded, and persecutions at once began, for religions only spring up amidst vexations and rebellions. And even as it was long ago at Jerusalem, when the tidings of miracles spread, the civil authorities—the Public Prosecutor, the Justice of the Peace, the Mayor, and particularly the Prefect of Tarbes—were all roused and began to bestir themselves. The Prefect was a sincere Catholic, a worshipper, a man of perfect honour, but he also had the firm mind of a public functionary, was a passionate defender of order, and a declared adversary of fanaticism which gives birth to disorder and religious perversion. Under his orders at Lourdes there was a Commissary of Police, a man of great intelligence and shrewdness, who had hitherto dis-

charged his functions in a very proper way, and who, legitimately enough, beheld in this affair of the apparitions an opportunity to put his gift of sagacious skill to the proof. So the struggle began, and it was this Commissary who, on the first Sunday in Lent, at the time of the first apparitions, summoned Bernadette to his office in order that he might question her. He showed himself affectionate, then angry, then threatening, but all in vain ; the answers which the girl gave him were ever the same. The story which she related, with its slowly accumulated details, had little by little irrevocably implanted itself in her infantile mind. And it was no lie on the part of this poor suffering creature, this exceptional victim of hysteria, but an unconscious haunting, a radical lack of will-power to free herself from her original hallucination. She knew not how to exert any such will, she could not, she would not exert it. Ah ! the poor child, the dear child, so amiable and so gentle, so incapable of any evil thought, from that time forward lost to life, crucified by her fixed idea, whence one could only have extricated her by changing her environment, by restoring her to the open air, in some land of daylight and human affection. But she was the chosen one, she had beheld the Virgin, she would suffer from it her whole life long and die from it at last !

Pierre, who knew Bernadette so well, and who felt a fraternal pity for her memory, the fervent compassion with which one regards a human saint, a simple, upright, charming creature tortured by her faith, allowed his emotion to appear in his moist eyes

and trembling voice. And a pause in his narrative ensued. Marie, who had hitherto been lying there quite stiff, with a hard expression of revolt still upon her face, opened her clenched hands and made a vague gesture of pity. "Ah," she murmured, "the poor child, all alone to contend against those magistrates, and so innocent, so proud, so unshakable in her championship of the truth!"

The same compassionate sympathy was arising from all the beds in the ward. That hospital *inferno* with its nocturnal wretchedness, its pestilential atmosphere, its pallets of anguish heaped together, its weary lady-hospitallers and Sisters flitting phantom-like hither and thither, now seemed to be illumined by a ray of divine charity. Was not the eternal illusion of happiness rising once more amidst tears and unconscious falsehoods? Poor, poor Bernadette! All waxed indignant at the thought of the persecutions which she had endured in defence of her faith.

Then Pierre, resuming his story, related all that the child had had to suffer. After being questioned by the Commissary she had to appear before the judges of the local tribunal. The entire magistracy pursued her, and endeavoured to wring a retractation from her. But the obstinacy of her dream was stronger than the common sense of all the civil authorities put together. Two doctors who were sent by the Prefect to make a careful examination of the girl came, as all doctors would have done, to the honest opinion that it was a case of nervous trouble, of which the asthma was a sure sign, and

which, in certain circumstances, might have induced visions. This nearly led to her removal and confinement in a hospital at Tarbes. But public exasperation was feared. A bishop had fallen on his knees before her. Some ladies had sought to buy favours from her for gold. Moreover she had found a refuge with the Sisters of Nevers, who tended the aged in the town asylum, and there she made her first communion, and was with difficulty taught to read and write. As the Blessed Virgin seemed to have chosen her solely to work the happiness of others, and she herself had not been cured, it was very sensibly decided to take her to the baths of Cauterets, which were so near at hand. However, they did her no good. And no sooner had she returned to Lourdes than the torture of being questioned and adored by a whole people began afresh, became aggravated, and filled her more and more with horror of the world. Her life was over already; she would be a playful child no more; she could never be a young girl dreaming of a husband, a young wife kissing the cheeks of sturdy children. She had beheld the Virgin, she was the chosen one, the martyr. If the Virgin, said believers, had confided three secrets to her, investing her with a triple armour as it were, it was simply in order to sustain her in her appointed course.

The clergy had for a long time remained aloof, on its own side full of doubt and anxiety. Abbé Peyramale, the parish priest of Lourdes, was a man of somewhat blunt ways, but full of infinite kindness, rectitude, and energy whenever he found himself in

what he thought the right path. On the first occasion when Bernadette visited him, he received this child who had been brought up at Bartrès and had not yet been seen at Catechism, almost as sternly as the Commissary of Police had done; in fact, he refused to believe her story, and with some irony told her to entreat the Lady to begin by making the briars blossom beneath her feet, which, by the way, the Lady never did. And if the Abbé ended by taking the child under his protection like a good pastor who defends his flock, it was simply through the advent of persecution and the talk of imprisoning this puny child, whose clear eyes shone so frankly, and who clung with such modest, gentle stubbornness to her original tale. Besides, why should he have continued denying the miracle after merely doubting it like a prudent priest who had no desire to see religion mixed up in any suspicious affair? Holy Writ is full of prodigies, all dogma is based on the mysterious; and that being so, there was nothing to prevent him, a priest, from believing that the Virgin had really entrusted Bernadette with a pious message for him, an injunction to build a church whither the faithful would repair in procession. Thus it was that he began loving and defending Bernadette for her charm's sake, whilst still refraining from active interference, awaiting as he did the decision of his Bishop.

This Bishop, Monseigneur Laurence, seemed to have shut himself up in his episcopal residence at Tarbes, locking himself within it and preserving absolute silence as though there were nothing occur-

ring at Lourdes of a nature to interest him. He had given strict instructions to his clergy, and so far not a priest had appeared among the vast crowds of people who spent their days before the Grotto. He waited, and even allowed the Prefect to state in his administrative circulars that the civil and the religious authorities were acting in concert. In reality, he cannot have believed in the apparitions of the Grotto of Massabielle, which he doubtless considered to be the mere hallucinations of a sick child. This affair, which was revolutionising the region, was of sufficient importance for him to have studied it day by day, and the manner in which he disregarded it for so long a time shows how little inclined he was to admit the truth of the alleged miracles, and how greatly he desired to avoid compromising the Church in a matter which seemed destined to end badly. With all his piety, Monseigneur Laurence had a cool, practical intellect, which enabled him to govern his diocese with great good sense. Impatient and ardent people nicknamed him Saint Thomas at the time, on account of the manner in which his doubts persisted until events at last forced his hand. Indeed, he turned a deaf ear to all the stories that were being related, firmly resolved as he was that he would only listen to them if it should appear certain that religion had nothing to lose.

However, the persecutions were about to become more pronounced. The Minister of Worship in Paris, who had been informed of what was going on, required that a stop should be put to all disorders, and so the Prefect caused the approaches to the

Grotto to be occupied by the military. The Grotto had already been decorated with vases of flowers offered by the zeal of the faithful and the gratitude of sufferers who had been healed. Money, moreover, was thrown into it; gifts to the Blessed Virgin abounded. Rudimentary improvements, too, were carried out in a spontaneous way; some quarrymen cut a kind of reservoir to receive the miraculous water, and others removed the large blocks of stone, and traced a path in the hillside. However, in presence of the swelling torrents of people, the Prefect, after renouncing his idea of arresting Bernadette, took the serious resolution of preventing all access to the Grotto by placing a strong palisade in front of it. Some regrettable incidents had lately occurred; various children pretended that they had seen the devil, some of them being guilty of simulation in this respect, whilst others had given way to real attacks of hysteria, in the contagious nervous unhinging which was so prevalent. But what a terrible business did the removal of the offerings from the Grotto prove! It was only towards evening that the Commissary was able to find a girl willing to let him have a cart on hire, and two hours later this girl fell from a loft and broke one of her ribs. Likewise, a man who had lent an axe had one of his feet crushed on the morrow by the fall of a block of stone.[1] It was in the midst of jeers and hisses that the Commissary carried off the pots of flowers, the tapers which he found burning, the

[1] Both of these accidents were interpreted as miracles.—*Trans.*

coppers and the silver hearts which lay upon the sand. People clenched their fists, and covertly called him "thief" and "murderer." Then the posts for the palisades were planted in the ground, and the rails were nailed to the crossbars, no little labour being performed to shut off the Mystery, in order to bar access to the Unknown, and put the miracles in prison. And the civil authorities were simple enough to imagine that it was all over, that those few bits of boarding would suffice to stay the poor people who hungered for illusion and hope.

But as soon as the new religion was proscribed, forbidden by the law as an offence, it began to burn with an inextinguishable flame in the depths of every soul. Believers came to the river bank in far greater numbers, fell upon their knees at a short distance from the Grotto, and sobbbed aloud as they gazed at the forbidden heaven. And the sick, the poor ailing folks, who were forbidden to seek cure, rushed on the Grotto despite all prohibitions, slipped in whenever they could find an aperture or climbed over the palings when their strength enabled them to do so, in the one ardent desire to steal a little of the water. What! there was a prodigious water in that Grotto, which restored the sight to the blind, which set the infirm erect upon their legs again, which instantaneously healed all ailments; and there were officials cruel enough to put that water under lock and key so that it might not cure any more poor people! Why, it was monstrous! And a cry of hatred arose from all the humble ones, all the disinherited ones who had as much need of the Marvellous as of bread

to live! In accordance with a municipal decree, the names of all delinquents were to be taken by the police, and thus one soon beheld a woeful *défilé* of old women and lame men summoned before the Justice of the Peace for the sole offence of taking a little water from the fount of life! They stammered and entreated, at their wit's end when a fine was imposed upon them. And, outside, the crowd was growling; rageful unpopularity was gathering around those magistrates who treated human wretchedness so harshly, those pitiless masters who after taking all the wealth of the world, would not even leave to the poor their dream of the realms beyond, their belief that a beneficent superior power took a maternal interest in them, and was ready to endow them with peace of soul and health of body. One day a whole band of poverty-stricken and ailing folks went to the Mayor, knelt down in his courtyard, and implored him with sobs to allow the Grotto to be reopened; and the words they spoke were so pitiful that all who heard them wept. A mother showed her child who was half-dead; would they let the little one die like that in her arms when there was a source yonder which had saved the children of other mothers? A blind man called attention to his dim eyes; a pale, scrofulous youth displayed the sores on his legs; a paralytic woman sought to join her woeful twisted hands: did the authorities wish to see them all perish, did they refuse them the last divine chance of life, condemned and abandoned as they were by the science of man? And equally great was the distress of the believers, of those who

were convinced that a corner of heaven had opened amidst the night of their mournful existences, and who were indignant that they should be deprived of the chimerical delight, the supreme relief for their human and social sufferings, which they found in the belief that the Blessed Virgin had indeed come down from heaven to bring them the priceless balm of her intervention. However, the Mayor was unable to promise anything, and the crowd withdrew weeping, ready for rebellion, as though under the blow of some great act of injustice, an act of idiotic cruelty towards the humble and the simple for which Heaven would assuredly take vengeance.

The struggle went on for several months; and it was an extraordinary spectacle which those sensible men—the Minister, the Prefect, and the Commissary of Police—presented, all animated with the best intentions and contending against the ever-swelling crowd of despairing ones, who would not allow the doors of dreamland to be closed upon them, who would not be shut off from the mystic glimpse of future happiness in which they found consolation for their present wretchedness. The authorities required order, the respect of a discreet religion, the triumph of reason; whereas the need of happiness carried the people off into an enthusiastic desire for cure both in this world and in the next. Oh! to cease suffering, to secure equality in the comforts of life; to march on under the protection of a just and beneficent Mother, to die only to awaken in heaven! And necessarily the burning desire of the multitude, the holy madness of the universal joy, was destined to sweep aside

the rigid, morose conceptions of a well-regulated society in which the ever-recurring epidemical attacks of religious hallucination are condemned as prejudicial to good order and healthiness of mind.

The Sainte-Honorine Ward, on hearing the story, likewise revolted. Pierre again had to pause, for many were the stifled exclamations in which the Commissary of Police was likened to Satan and Herod. La Grivotte had sat up on her mattress, stammering: "Ah! the monsters! To behave like that to the Blessed Virgin who has cured me!"

And even Madame Vêtu—once more penetrated by a ray of hope amidst the covert certainty she felt that she was going to die—grew angry at the idea that the Grotto would not have existed had the Prefect won the day. "There would have been no pilgrimages," she said, "we should not be here, hundreds of us would not be cured every year."

A fit of stifling came over her, however, and Sister Hyacinthe had to raise her to a sitting posture. Madame de Jonquière was profiting by the interruption to attend to a young woman afflicted with a spinal complaint, whilst two other women, unable to remain on their beds, so unbearable was the heat, prowled about with short, silent steps, looking quite white in the misty darkness. And from the far end of the ward, where all was black, there resounded a noise of painful breathing, which had been going on without a pause, accompanying Pierre's narrative like a rattle. Elise Rouquet alone was sleeping peacefully, still stretched upon her back, and displaying her disfigured countenance, which was slowly drying.

Midnight had struck a quarter of an hour previously, and Abbé Judaine might arrive at any moment for the communion. Grace was now again descending into Marie's heart, and she was convinced that if the Blessed Virgin had refused to cure her it was, indeed, her own fault in having doubted when she entered the piscina. And she, therefore, repented of her rebellion as of a crime. Could she ever be forgiven? Her pale face sank down among her beautiful fair hair, her eyes filled with tears, and she looked at Pierre with an expression of anguish. "Oh! how wicked I was, my friend," she said. "It was through hearing you relate how that Prefect and those magistrates sinned through pride, that I understood my transgression. One must believe, my friend; there is no happiness outside faith and love."

Then, as Pierre wished to break off at the point which he had reached, they all began protesting and calling for the continuation of his narrative, so that he had to promise to go on to the triumph of the Grotto.

Its entrance remained barred by the palisade, and you had to come secretly at night if you wished to pray and carry off a stolen bottle of water. Still, the fear of rioting increased, for it was rumoured that whole villages intended to come down from the hills in order to deliver God, as they naïvely expressed it. It was a *levée en masse* of the humble, a rush of those who hungered for the miraculous, so irresistible in its impetuosity that mere common sense, mere considerations of public order were to be swept away like chaff. And it was Monseigneur Laurence, in

his episcopal residence at Tarbes, who was first forced to surrender. All his prudence, all his doubts were outflanked by the popular outburst. For five long months he had been able to remain aloof, preventing his clergy from following the faithful to the Grotto, and defending the Church against the tornado of superstition which had been let loose. But what was the use of struggling any longer? He felt the wretchedness of the suffering people committed to his care to be so great that he resigned himself to granting them the idolatrous religion for which he realised them to be eager. Some prudence remaining to him, however, he contented himself in the first instance with drawing up an *ordonnance*, appointing a commission of inquiry, which was to investigate the question; this implied the acceptance of the miracles after a period of longer or shorter duration. If Monseigneur Laurence was the man of healthy culture and cool reason that he is pictured to have been, how great must have been his anguish on the morning when he signed that *ordonnance!* He must have knelt in his oratory, and have begged the Sovereign Master of the world to dictate his conduct to him. He did not believe in the apparitions; he had a loftier, more intellectual idea of the manifestations of the Divinity. Only would he not be showing true pity and mercy in silencing the scruples of his reason, the noble prejudices of his faith, in presence of the necessity of granting that bread of falsehood which poor humanity requires in order to be happy? Doubtless, he begged the pardon of Heaven for allowing it to be mixed up in what he

regarded as childish pastime, for exposing it to ridicule in connection with an affair in which there was only sickliness and dementia. But his flock suffered so much, hungered so ravenously for the marvellous, for fairy stories with which to lull the pains of life. And thus, in tears, the Bishop at last sacrificed his respect for the dignity of Providence to his sensitive pastoral charity for the woeful human flock.

Then the Emperor in his turn gave way. He was at Biarritz at the time, and was kept regularly informed of everything connected with this affair of the apparitions, with which the entire Parisian press was also occupying itself, for the persecutions would not have been complete if the pens of Voltairean newspaper-men had not meddled in them. And whilst his Minister, his Prefect, and his Commissary of Police were fighting for common sense and public order, the Emperor preserved his wonted silence—the deep silence of a day-dreamer which nobody ever penetrated. Petitions arrived day by day, yet he held his tongue. Bishops came, great personages, great ladies of his circle watched and drew him on one side, and still he held his tongue. A truceless warfare was being waged around him : on one side the believers and the men of fanciful minds whom the Mysterious strongly interested ; on the other the unbelievers and the statesmen who distrusted the disturbances of the imagination ;—and still and ever he held his tongue. Then, all at once, with the sudden decision of a naturally timid man, he spoke out. The rumour spread that he had yielded to the entreaties of his wife Eugénie. No doubt she

did intervene, but the Emperor was more deeply influenced by a revival of his old humanitarian dreams, his genuine compassion for the disinherited.[1] Like the Bishop, he did not wish to close the portals of illusion to the wretched by upholding the unpopular decree which forbade despairing sufferers to go and drink life at the holy source. So he sent a telegram, a curt order to remove the palisade, so as to allow everybody free access to the Grotto.

Then came a shout of joy and triumph. The decree annulling the previous one was read at Lourdes to the sound of drum and trumpet. The Commissary of Police had to come in person to superintend the removal of the palisade. He was afterwards transferred elsewhere like the Prefect.[2] People flocked to Lourdes from all parts, the new *cultus* was organised at the Grotto, and a cry of joy ascended: God had won the victory! God?—alas, no! It was human wretchedness which had won the battle, human wretchedness with its eternal need of falsehood, its

[1] I think this view of the matter the right one, for, as all who know the history of the Second Empire are aware, it was about this time that the Emperor began taking great interest in the erection of model dwellings for the working classes, and the plantation and transformation of the sandy wastes of the Landes.—*Trans.*

[2] The Prefect was transferred to Grenoble, and curiously enough his new jurisdiction extended over the hills and valleys of La Salette, whither pilgrims likewise flocked to drink, pray, and wash themselves at a miraculous fountain. Warned by experience, however, Baron Massy (such was the Prefect's name) was careful to avoid any further interference in religious matters.—*Trans.*

hunger for the marvellous, its everlasting hope akin to that of some condemned man who, for salvation's sake, surrenders himself into the hands of an invisible Omnipotence, mightier than nature, and alone capable, should it be willing, of annulling nature's laws. And that which had also conquered was the sovereign compassion of those pastors, the merciful Bishop and merciful Emperor who allowed those big sick children to retain the fetich which consoled some of them and at times even cured others.

In the middle of November the episcopal commission came to Lourdes to prosecute the inquiry which had been entrusted to it. It questioned Bernadette yet once again, and studied a large number of miracles. However, in order that the evidence might be absolute, it only registered some thirty cases of cure. And Monseigneur Laurence declared himself convinced. Nevertheless, he gave a final proof of his prudence, by continuing to wait another three years before declaring in a pastoral letter that the Blessed Virgin had in truth appeared at the Grotto of Massabielle and that numerous miracles had subsequently taken place there. Meantime, he had purchased the Grotto itself, with all the land around it, from the municipality of Lourdes, on behalf of his see. Work was then begun, modestly at first, but soon on a larger and larger scale as money began to flow in from all parts of Christendom. The Grotto was cleared and enclosed with an iron railing. The Gave was thrown back into a new bed, so as to allow of spacious approaches to the shrine, with lawns, paths, and walks. At last, too, the church

which the Virgin had asked for, the Basilica, began to rise on the summit of the rock itself. From the very first stroke of the pick, Abbé Peyramale, the parish priest of Lourdes, went on directing everything with even excessive zeal, for the struggle had made him the most ardent and most sincere of all believers in the work that was to be accomplished. With his somewhat rough but truly fatherly nature, he had begun to adore Bernadette, making her mission his own, and devoting himself, soul and body, to realising the orders which he had received from Heaven through her innocent mouth. And he exhausted himself in mighty efforts; he wished everything to be very beautiful and very grand, worthy of the Queen of the Angels who had deigned to visit this mountain nook. The first religious ceremony did not take place till six years after the apparitions. A marble statue of the Virgin was installed with great pomp on the very spot where she had appeared. It was a magnificent day, all Lourdes was gay with flags, and every bell rang joyously. Five years later, in 1869, the first mass was celebrated in the crypt of the Basilica, whose spire was not yet finished. Meantime, gifts flowed in without a pause, a river of gold was streaming towards the Grotto, a whole town was about to spring up from the soil. It was the new religion completing its foundations. The desire to be healed did heal; the thirst for a miracle worked the miracle. A Deity of pity and hope was evolved from man's sufferings, from that longing for falsehood and relief which, in every age of humanity, has created the marvellous palaces of the realms

beyond, where an almighty Power renders justice and distributes eternal happiness.

And thus the ailing ones of the Sainte-Honorine Ward only beheld in the victory of the Grotto the triumph of their hopes of cure. Along the rows of beds there was a quiver of joy when, with his heart stirred by all those poor faces turned towards him, eager for certainty, Pierre repeated : " God had conquered. Since that day the miracles have never ceased, and it is the most humble who are the most frequently relieved."

Then he laid down the little book. Abbé Judaine was coming in, and the Sacrament was about to be administered. Marie, however, again penetrated by the fever of faith, her hands burning, leant towards Pierre. " Oh, my friend ! " said she, " I pray you hear me confess my fault and absolve me. I have blasphemed, and have been guilty of mortal sin. If you do not succour me, I shall be unable to receive the Blessed Sacrament, and yet I so greatly need to be consoled and strengthened."

The young priest refused her request with a wave of the hand. He had never been willing to act as confessor to this friend, the only woman he had loved in the healthy, smiling days of youth. However, she insisted. " I beg you to do so," said she ; " you will help to work the miracle of my cure."

Then he gave way and received the avowal of her fault, that impious rebellion induced by suffering, that rebellion against the Virgin who had remained deaf to her prayers. And afterwards he granted her absolution in the sacramental form.

Meanwhile Abbé Judaine had already deposited the ciborium on a little table, between two lighted tapers, which looked like woeful stars in the semi-obscurity of the ward. Madame de Jonquière had just decided to open one of the windows quite wide, for the odour emanating from all the suffering bodies and heaped-up rags had become unbearable. But no air came in from the narrow courtyard into which the window opened; though black with night, it seemed like a well of fire. Having offered to act as server, Pierre repeated the "Confiteor." Then, after responding with the "Misereatur" and the "Indulgentiam," the chaplain, who wore his alb, raised the pyx, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world." All the women who, writhing in agony, were impatiently awaiting the communion, like dying creatures who await life from some fresh medicine which is a long time coming, thereupon thrice repeated, in all humility, and with lips almost closed: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof; but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

Abbé Judaine had begun to make the round of those woeful beds, accompanied by Pierre, and followed by Madame de Jonquière and Sister Hyacinthe, each of whom carried one of the lighted tapers. The Sister designated those who were to communicate; and, murmuring the customary Latin words, the priest leant forward and placed the Host somewhat at random on the sufferer's tongue. Almost all were waiting for him with widely opened, glittering eyes, amidst the disorder of that hastily

pitched camp. Two were found to be sound asleep, however, and had to be awakened. Several were moaning without being conscious of it, and continued moaning even after they had received the sacrament. At the far end of the ward, the rattle of the poor creature who could not be seen still resounded. And nothing could have been more mournful than the appearance of that little *cortège* in the semi-darkness, amidst which the yellow flames of the tapers gleamed like stars.

But Marie's face, to which an expression of ecstasy had returned, was like a divine apparition. Although La Grivotte was hungering for the bread of life, they had refused her the sacrament on this occasion, as it was to be administered to her in the morning at the Rosary; Madame Vêtu, however, had received the Host on her black tongue in a hiccough. And now Marie was lying there under the pale light of the tapers, looking so beautiful amidst her fair hair, with her eyes dilated and her features transfigured by faith, that everyone admired her. She received the sacrament with rapture; Heaven visibly descended into her poor, youthful frame, reduced to such physical wretchedness. And, clasping Pierre's hand, she detained him for a moment, saying: "Oh! she will heal me, my friend, she has just promised me that she will do so. Go and take some rest. I shall sleep so soundly now!"

As he withdrew in company with Abbé Judaine, Pierre caught sight of little Madame Désagneaux stretched out in the arm-chair in which weariness had overpowered her. Nothing could awaken her. It

was now half-past one in the morning ; and Madame de Jonquière and her assistant, Sister Hyacinthe, were still going backwards and forwards, turning the patients over, cleansing them, and dressing their sores. However, the ward was becoming more peaceful, its heavy darkness had grown less oppressive since Bernadette with her charm had passed through it. The visionary's little shadow was now flitting in triumph from bed to bed, completing its work, bringing a little of heaven to each of the despairing ones, each of the disinherited ones of this world ; and as they all at last sank to sleep they could see the little shepherdess, so young, so ill herself, leaning over them and kissing them with a kindly smile.

THE THIRD DAY

I

BED AND BOARD

At seven o'clock on the morning of that fine, bright, warm August Sunday, M. de Guersaint was already up and dressed in one of the two little rooms which he had fortunately been able to secure on the third floor of the Hotel of the Apparitions. He had gone to bed at eleven o'clock the night before and had awoke feeling quite fresh and gay. As soon as he was dressed he entered the adjoining room which Pierre occupied ; but the young priest, who had not returned to the hotel until past one in the morning, with his blood heated by insomnia, had been unable to doze off until daybreak and was now still slumbering. His cassock flung across a chair, his other garments scattered here and there, testified to his great weariness and agitation of mind.

"Come, come, you lazybones !" cried M. de Guersaint gaily ; " can't you hear the bells ringing ? "

Pierre awoke with a start, quite surprised to find himself in that little hotel room into which the sunlight was streaming. All the joyous peals of the bells,

the music of the chiming, happy town, moreover, came in through the window which he had left open.

"We shall never have time to get to the hospital before eight o'clock to fetch Marie," resumed M. de Guersaint, "for we must have some breakfast, eh?"

"Of course, make haste and order two cups of chocolate. I will get up at once, I sha'n't be long," replied Pierre.

In spite of the fatigue which had already stiffened his joints, he sprang out of bed as soon as he was alone, and made all haste with his toilet. However, he still had his head in the washing basin, ducking it in the fresh, cool water, when M. de Guersaint, who was unable to remain alone, came back again. "I 've given the order," said he; "they will bring it up. Ah! what a curious place this hotel is! You have of course seen the landlord, Master Majesté, clad in white from head to foot and looking so dignified in his office. The place is crammed, it appears; they have never had so many people before. So it is no wonder that there should be such a fearful noise. I was wakened up three times during the night. People kept on talking in the room next to mine. And you, did you sleep well?"

"No, indeed," answered Pierre; "I was tired to death, but I could n't close my eyes. No doubt it was the uproar you speak of that prevented me."

In his turn he then began to talk of the thin partitions, and the manner in which the house had been crammed with people until it seemed as though the floors and the walls would collapse with the strain. The place had been shaking all night long; every

now and then people suddenly rushed along the passages, heavy footfalls resounded, gruff voices ascended nobody knew whence ; without speaking of all the moaning and coughing, the frightful coughing which seemed to re-echo from every wall. Throughout the night people evidently came in and went out, got up and lay down again, paying no attention to time in the disorder in which they lived, amid shocks of passion which made them hurry to their devotional exercises as to pleasure parties.

" And Marie, how was she when you left her last night ? " M. de Guersaint suddenly inquired.

" A great deal better," replied Pierre ; " she had an attack of extreme discouragement, but all her courage and faith returned to her at last."

A pause followed ; and then the girl's father resumed with his tranquil optimism : " Oh ! I am not anxious. Things will go on all right, you 'll see. For my own part, I am delighted. I had asked the Virgin to grant me her protection in my affairs—you know, my great invention of navigable balloons. Well, suppose I told you that she has already shown me her favour ? Yes, indeed ; yesterday evening while I was talking with Abbé des Hermoises, he told me that at Toulouse he would no doubt be able to find a person to finance me—one of his friends, in fact, who is extremely wealthy and takes great interest in mechanics ! And in this I at once saw the hand of God ! " M. de Guersaint began laughing with his childish laugh, and then he added : " That Abbé des Hermoises is a charming man. I shall see this afternoon if there is any means of my accom-

panying him on an excursion to the Cirque de Gavarnie at small cost."

Pierre, who wished to pay everything, the hotel bill and all the rest, at once encouraged him in this idea. "Of course," said he, "you ought not to miss this opportunity to visit the mountains, since you have so great a wish to do so. Your daughter will be very happy to know that you are pleased."

Their talk, however, was now interrupted by a servant girl bringing the two cups of chocolate with a couple of rolls on a metal tray covered with a napkin. She left the door open as she entered the room, so that a glimpse was obtained of some portion of the passage. "Ah! they are already doing my neighbour's room!" exclaimed M. de Guersaint. "He is a married man, is n't he? His wife is with him?"

The servant looked astonished. "Oh, no," she replied, "he is quite alone!"

"Quite alone? Why, I heard people talking in his room this morning."

"You must be mistaken, monsieur," said the servant; "he has just gone out after giving orders that his room was to be tidied up at once." And then, while taking the cups of chocolate off the tray and placing them on the table, she continued: "Oh! he is a very respectable gentleman. Last year he was able to have one of the pavilions which Monsieur Majesté lets out to visitors, in the lane by the side of the hotel; but this year he applied too late and had to content himself with that room, which greatly worried him, for it is n't a large one, though there is

a big cupboard in it. As he does n't care to eat with everybody, he takes his meals there, and he orders good wine and the best of everything, I can tell you."

"That explains it all!" replied M. de Guersaint gaily; "he dined too well last night, and I must have heard him talking in his sleep."

Pierre had been listening somewhat inquisitively to all this chatter. "And on this side, my side," said he, "is n't there a gentleman with two ladies, and a little boy who walks about with a crutch?"

"Yes, Monsieur l'Abbé, I know them. The aunt, Madame Chaise, took one of the two rooms for herself; and Monsieur and Madame Vigneron with their son Gustave have had to content themselves with the other one. This is the second year they have come to Lourdes. They are very respectable people too."

Pierre nodded. During the night he had fancied he could recognise the voice of M. Vigneron, whom the heat doubtless had incommoded. However, the servant was now thoroughly started, and she began to enumerate the other persons whose rooms were reached by the same passage; on the left hand there was a priest, then a mother with three daughters, and then an old married couple; whilst on the right lodged another gentleman who was all alone, a young lady, too, who was unaccompanied, and then a family party which included five young children. The hotel was crowded to its garrets. The servants had had to give up their rooms the previous evening and lie in a heap in the washhouse. During the night, also, some camp bedsteads had even been set

up on the landings ; and one honourable ecclesiastic, for lack of other accommodation, had been obliged to sleep on a billiard-table.

When the girl had retired and the two men had drunk their chocolate, M. de Guersaint went back into his own room to wash his hands again, for he was very careful of his person ; and Pierre, who remained alone, felt attracted by the gay sunlight, and stepped for a moment on to the narrow balcony outside his window. Each of the third-floor rooms on this side of the hotel was provided with a similar balcony, having a carved-wood balustrade. However, the young priest's surprise was very great, for he had scarcely stepped outside when he suddenly saw a woman protrude her head over the balcony next to him—that of the room occupied by the gentleman whom M. de Guersaint and the servant had been speaking of.

And this woman he had recognised : it was Madame Volmar. There was no mistaking her long face with its delicate drawn features, its magnificent large eyes, those brasiers over which a veil, a dimming *moire*, seemed to pass at times. She gave a start of terror on perceiving him. And he, extremely ill at ease, grieved that he should have frightened her, made all haste to withdraw into his apartment. A sudden light had dawned upon him, and he now understood and could picture everything. So this was why she had not been seen at the hospital, where little Madame Désagneaux was always asking for her. Standing motionless, his heart upset, Pierre fell into a deep reverie, reflecting

on the life led by this woman whom he knew, that torturing conjugal life in Paris between a fierce mother-in-law and an unworthy husband, and then those three days of complete liberty spent at Lourdes, that brief bonfire of passion to which she had hastened under the sacrilegious pretext of serving the divinity. Tears whose cause he could not even explain, tears that ascended from the very depths of his being, from his own voluntary chastity, welled into his eyes amidst the feeling of intense sorrow which came over him.

"Well, are you ready?" joyously called M. de Guersaint as he came back, with his grey jacket buttoned up and his hands gloved.

"Yes, yes, let us go," replied Pierre, turning aside and pretending to look for his hat so that he might wipe his eyes.

Then they went out, and on crossing the threshold heard on their left hand an unctuous voice which they recognised; it was that of M. Vigneron, who was loudly repeating the morning prayers. A moment afterwards came a meeting which interested them. They were walking down the passage when they were passed by a middle-aged, thick-set, sturdy-looking gentleman, wearing carefully trimmed whiskers. He bent his back and passed so rapidly that they were unable to distinguish his features, but they noticed that he was carrying a carefully made parcel. And immediately afterwards he slipped a key into the lock of the room adjoining M. de Guersaint's, and opening the door disappeared noiselessly, like a shadow.

M. de Guersaint had glanced round: "Ah! my neighbour," said he; "he has been to market and has brought back some delicacies, no doubt!"

Pierre pretended not to hear, for his companion was so light-minded that he did not care to trust him with a secret which was not his own. Besides, a feeling of uneasiness was returning to him, a kind of chaste terror at the thought that the world and the flesh were there taking their revenge, amidst all the mystical enthusiasm which he could feel around him.

They reached the hospital just as the patients were being brought out to be carried to the Grotto; and they found that Marie had slept well and was very gay. She kissed her father and scolded him when she learnt that he had not yet decided on his trip to Gavarnie. She should really be displeased with him, she said, if he did not go. Still with the same restful, smiling expression, she added that she did not expect to be cured that day; and then, assuming an air of mystery, she begged Pierre to obtain permission for her to spend the following night before the Grotto. This was a favour which all the sufferers ardently coveted, but which only a few favoured ones with difficulty secured. After protesting, anxious as he felt with regard to the effect which a night spent in the open air might have upon her health, the young priest, seeing how unhappy she had suddenly become, at last promised that he would make the application. Doubtless she imagined that she would only obtain a hearing from the Virgin when they were alone together in the slumbering peacefulness of the night. That morning,

indeed, she felt so lost among the innumerable patients who were heaped together in front of the Grotto, that already at ten o'clock she asked to be taken back to the hospital, complaining that the bright light tired her eyes. And when her father and the priest had again installed her in the Sainte-Honorine Ward, she gave them their liberty for the remainder of the day. "No, don't come to fetch me," she said, "I shall not go back to the Grotto this afternoon—it would be useless. But you will come for me this evening at nine o'clock, won't you, Pierre? It is agreed, you have given me your word."

He repeated that he would endeavour to secure the requisite permission, and that, if necessary, he would apply to Father Fourcade in person.

"Then, till this evening, darling," said M. de Guersaint, kissing his daughter. And he and Pierre went off together, leaving her lying on her bed, with an absorbed expression on her features, as her large, smiling eyes wandered away into space.

It was barely half-past ten when they got back to the Hotel of the Apparitions; but M. de Guersaint, whom the fine weather delighted, talked of having *déjeuner* at once, so that he might the sooner start upon a ramble through Lourdes. First of all, however, he wished to go up to his room, and Pierre following him, they encountered quite a drama on their way. The door of the room occupied by the Vignerons was wide open, and little Gustave could be seen lying on the sofa which served as his bed. He was livid; a moment previously he had suddenly

fainted, and this had made the father and mother imagine that the end had come. Madame Vigneron was crouching on a chair, still stupefied by her fright, whilst M. Vigneron rushed about the room, thrusting everything aside in order that he might prepare a glass of sugared-water, to which he added a few drops of some elixir. This draught, he exclaimed, would set the lad right again. But all the same, it was incomprehensible. The boy was still strong, and to think that he should have fainted like that, and have turned as white as a chicken! Speaking in this wise, M. Vigneron glanced at Madame Chaise, the aunt, who was standing in front of the sofa, looking in good health that morning; and his hands shook yet more violently at the covert idea that if that stupid attack had carried off his son, they would no longer have inherited the aunt's fortune. He was quite beside himself at this thought, and eagerly opening the boy's mouth he compelled him to swallow the entire contents of the glass. Then, however, when he heard Gustave sigh, and saw him open his eyes again, his fatherly good-nature reappeared, and he shed tears, and called the lad his dear little fellow. But on Madame Chaise drawing near to offer some assistance, Gustave repulsed her with a sudden gesture of hatred, as though he understood how this woman's money unconsciously perverted his parents, who, after all, were worthy folks. Greatly offended, the old lady turned on her heel, and seated herself in a corner, whilst the father and mother, at last freed from their anxiety, returned thanks to the Blessed Virgin for having preserved their darling,

who smiled at them with his intelligent and infinitely sorrowful smile, knowing and understanding everything as he did, and no longer having any taste for life, although he was not fifteen.

"Can we be of any help to you?" asked Pierre in an obliging way.

"No, no, I thank you, gentlemen," replied M. Vigneron, coming for a moment into the passage. "But oh! we did have a fright! Think of it, an only son, who is so dear to us too."

All around them the approach of the *déjeuner* hour was now throwing the house into commotion. Every door was banging, and the passages and the staircase resounded with the constant pitter-patter of feet. Three big girls passed by, raising a current of air with the sweep of their skirts. Some little children were crying in a neighbouring room. Then there were old people who seemed quite scared, and distracted priests who, forgetting their calling, caught up their cassocks with both hands, so that they might run the faster to the dining-room. From the top to the bottom of the house one could feel the floors shaking under the excessive weight of all the people who were packed inside the hotel.

"Oh, I hope that it is all over now, and that the Blessed Virgin will cure him," repeated M. Vigneron, before allowing his neighbours to retire. "We are going down-stairs, for I must confess that all this has made me feel faint. I need something to eat, I am terribly hungry."

When Pierre and M. de Guersaint at last left their rooms, and went down-stairs, they found to their

annoyance that there was not the smallest table-corner vacant in the large dining-room. A most extraordinary mob had assembled there, and the few seats that were still unoccupied were reserved. A waiter informed them that the room never emptied between ten and one o'clock, such was the rush of appetite, sharpened by the keen mountain air. So they had to resign themselves to wait, requesting the waiter to warn them as soon as there should be a couple of vacant places. Then, scarcely knowing what to do with themselves, they went to walk about the hotel porch, whence there was a view of the street, along which the townsfolk, in their Sunday best, streamed without a pause.

All at once, however, the landlord of the Hotel of the Apparitions, Master Majesté in person, appeared before them, clad in white from head to foot; and with a great show of politeness he inquired if the gentlemen would like to wait in the drawing-room. He was a stout man of five-and-forty, and strove to bear the burden of his name in a right royal fashion. Bald and clean-shaven, with round blue eyes in a waxy face, displaying three superposed chins, he always deported himself with much dignity. He had come from Nevers with the Sisters who managed the orphan asylum, and was married to a dusky little woman, a native of Lourdes. In less than fifteen years they had made their hotel one of the most substantial and best patronised establishments in the town. Of recent times, moreover, they had started a business in religious articles, installed in a large shop on the left of the hotel porch and managed

by a young niece under Madame Majesté's supervision.

"You can wait in the drawing-room, gentlemen," again suggested the hotel-keeper whom Pierre's cassock rendered very attentive.

They replied, however, that they preferred to walk about and wait in the open air. And thereupon Majesté would not leave them, but deigned to chat with them for a moment as he was wont to do with those of his customers whom he desired to honour. The conversation turned at first on the procession which would take place that night and which promised to be a superb spectacle as the weather was so fine. There were more than fifty thousand strangers gathered together in Lourdes that day, for visitors had come in from all the neighbouring bathing stations. This explained the crush at the *table d'hôte*. Possibly the town would run short of bread as had been the case the previous year.

"You saw what a scramble there is," concluded Majesté, "we really don't know how to manage. It is n't my fault, I assure you, if you are kept waiting for a short time."

At this moment, however, a postman arrived with a large batch of newspapers and letters which he deposited on a table in the office. He had kept one letter in his hand and inquired of the landlord, "Have you a Madame Maze here?"

"Madame Maze, Madame Maze," repeated the hotel-keeper. "No, no, certainly not."

Pierre had heard both question and answer, and drawing near he exclaimed, "I know of a Madame

Maze who must be lodging with the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, the Blue Sisters as people call them here, I think."

The postman thanked him for the information and went off, but a somewhat bitter smile had risen to Majesté's lips. "The Blue Sisters," he muttered, "ah! the Blue Sisters." Then, darting a side glance at Pierre's cassock, he stopped short, as though he feared that he might say too much. Yet his heart was overflowing; he would have greatly liked to ease his feelings, and this young priest from Paris, who looked so liberal-minded, could not be one of the "band" as he called all those who discharged functions at the Grotto and coined money out of Our Lady of Lourdes. Accordingly, little by little, he ventured to speak out.

"I am a good Christian, I assure you, Monsieur l'Abbé," said he. "In fact we are all good Christians here. And I am a regular worshipper and take the sacrament every Easter. But, really, I must say that members of a religious community ought not to keep hotels. No, no, it is n't right!"

And thereupon he vented all the spite of a tradesman in presence of what he considered to be disloyal competition. Ought not those Blue Sisters, those Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, to have confined themselves to their real functions, the manufacture of wafers for sacramental purposes, and the repairing and washing of church linen? Instead of that, however, they had transformed their convent into a vast hostelry, where ladies who came to Lourdes unaccompanied found separate rooms, and

were able to take their meals either in privacy or in a general dining-room. Everything was certainly very clean, very well organised and very inexpensive, thanks to the thousand advantages which the Sisters enjoyed ; in fact, no hotel at Lourdes did so much business. "But all the same," continued Majesté, "I ask you if it is proper. To think of nuns selling victuals ! Besides, I must tell you that the lady superior is really a clever woman, and as soon as she saw the stream of fortune rolling in, she wanted to keep it all for her own community and resolutely parted with the Fathers of the Grotto who wanted to lay their hands on it. Yes, Monsieur l'Abbé, she even went to Rome and gained her cause there, so that now she pockets all the money that her bills bring in. Think of it, nuns, yes nuns, *mon Dieu !* letting furnished rooms and keeping a *table d'hôte !*"

He raised his arms to heaven, he was stifling with envy and vexation.

"But as your house is crammed," Pierre gently objected, "as you no longer have either a bed or a plate at anybody's disposal, where would you put any additional visitors who might arrive here ?"

Majesté at once began protesting. "Ah ! Monsieur l'Abbé !" said he, "one can see very well that you don't know the place. It 's quite true that there is work for all of us, and that nobody has reason to complain during the national pilgrimage. But that only lasts four or five days, and in ordinary times the custom we secure is n't nearly so great. For myself, thank Heaven, I am always satisfied. My

house is well known, it occupies the same rank as the Hotel of the Grotto, where two landlords have already made their fortunes. But no matter, it is vexing to see those Blue Sisters taking all the cream of the custom, for instance the ladies of the *bourgeoisie* who spend a fortnight and three weeks here at a stretch; and that, too, just in the quiet season, when there are not many people here. You understand, don't you? There are people of position who dislike uproar; they go by themselves to the Grotto, and pray there all day long, for days together, and pay good prices for their accommodation without any higgling."

Madame Majesté, whom Pierre and M. de Guersaint had not noticed leaning over an account-book in which she was adding up some figures, thereupon intervened in a shrill voice: "We had a customer like that, gentlemen, who stayed here for two months last year. She went to the Grotto, came back, went there again, took her meals, and went to bed. And never did we have a word of complaint from her; she was always smiling, as though to say that she found everything very nice. She paid her bill, too, without even looking at it. Ah! one regrets people of that kind."

Short, thin, very dark, and dressed in black, with a little white collar, Madame Majesté had risen to her feet; and she now began to solicit custom: "If you would like to buy a few little souvenirs of Lourdes before you leave, gentlemen, I hope that you will not forget us. We have a shop close by, where you will find an assortment of all the articles that are

most in request. As a rule, the persons who stay here are kind enough not to deal elsewhere."

However, Majesté was again wagging his head, with the air of a good Christian saddened by the scandals of the time. "Certainly," said he, "I don't want to show any disrespect to the reverend Fathers, but it must in all truth be admitted that they are too greedy. You must have seen the shop which they have set up near the Grotto, that shop which is always crowded, and where tapers and articles of piety are sold. A bishop declared that it was shameful, and that the buyers and sellers ought to be driven out of the temple afresh. It is said, too, that the Fathers run that big shop yonder, just across the street, which supplies all the petty dealers in the town. And, according to the reports which circulate, they have a finger in all the trade in religious articles, and levy a percentage on the millions of chaplets, statuettes, and medals which are sold every year at Lourdes."

Majesté had now lowered his voice, for his accusations were becoming precise, and he ended by trembling somewhat at his imprudence in talking so confidentially to strangers. However, the expression of Pierre's gentle, attentive face reassured him; and so he continued with the passion of a wounded rival, resolved to go on to the very end: "I am willing to admit that there is some exaggeration in all this. But all the same, it does religion no good for people to see the reverend Fathers keeping shops like us tradesmen. For my part, of course, I don't go and ask for a share of the money which they

make by their masses, or a percentage on the presents which they receive, so why should they start selling what I sell? Our business was a poor one last year owing to them. There are already too many of us; nowadays everyone at Lourdes sells "religious articles," to such an extent, in fact, that there will soon be no butchers or wine merchants left —nothing but bread to eat and water to drink. Ah! Monsieur l'Abbé, it is no doubt nice to have the Blessed Virgin with us, but things are none the less very bad at times."

A person staying at the hotel at that moment disturbed him, but he returned just as a young girl came in search of Madame Majesté. The damsel, who evidently belonged to Lourdes, was very pretty, small but plump, with beautiful black hair, and a round face full of bright gaiety.

"That is our niece Apolline," resumed Majesté. "She has been keeping our shop for two years past. She is the daughter of one of my wife's brothers, who is in poor circumstances. She was keeping sheep at Ossun, in the neighbourhood of Bartrès, when we were struck by her intelligence and nice looks and decided to bring her here; and we don't repent having done so, for she has a great deal of merit, and has become a very good saleswoman."

A point to which he omitted to refer, was that there were rumours current of somewhat flighty conduct on Mademoiselle Apolline's part. But she undoubtedly had her value: she attracted customers by the power, possibly, of her large black eyes, which smiled so readily. During his sojourn at Lourdes the previous

year, Gérard de Peyrelongue had scarcely stirred from the shop she managed, and doubtless it was only the matrimonial ideas now flitting through his head that prevented him from returning thither. It seemed as though the Abbé des Hermoises had taken his place, for this gallant ecclesiastic brought a great many ladies to make purchases at the repository.

"Ah! you are speaking of Apolline," said Madame Majesté, at that moment coming back from the shop. "Have you noticed one thing about her, gentlemen—her extraordinary likeness to Bernadette? There, on the wall yonder, is a photograph of Bernadette when she was eighteen years old."

Pierre and M. de Guersaint drew near to examine the portrait, whilst Majesté exclaimed: "Bernadette, yes, certainly—she was rather like Apolline, but not nearly so nice; she looked so sad and poor."

He would doubtless have gone on chattering, but just then the waiter appeared and announced that there was at last a little table vacant. M. de Guersaint had twice gone to glance inside the dining-room, for he was eager to have his *déjeuner* and spend the remainder of that fine Sunday out-of-doors. So he now hastened away, without paying any further attention to Majesté, who remarked, with an amiable smile, that the gentlemen had not had so very long to wait after all.

To reach the table mentioned by the waiter, the architect and Pierre had to cross the dining-room from end to end. It was a long apartment, painted a light oak colour, an oily yellow, which was already peeling away in places and soiled with stains in

others. You realised that rapid wear and tear went on here amidst the continual scramble of the big eaters who sat down at table. The only ornaments were a gilt zinc clock and a couple of meagre candelabra on the mantelpiece. Guipure curtains, moreover, hung at the five large windows looking on to the street, which was flooded with sunshine; some of the fierce arrow-like rays penetrating into the room although the blinds had been lowered. And, in the middle of the apartment, some forty persons were packed together at the *table d'hôte*, which was scarcely eleven yards in length and did not supply proper accommodation for more than thirty people; whilst at the little tables standing against the walls upon either side another forty persons sat close together, hustled by the three waiters each time that they went by. You had scarcely reached the threshold before you were deafened by the extraordinary uproar, the noise of voices and the clatter of forks and plates; and it seemed, too, as if you were entering a damp oven, for a warm, steamy mist, laden with a suffocating smell of victuals, assailed the face.

Pierre at first failed to distinguish anything, but when he was installed at the little table—a garden-table which had been brought indoors for the occasion, and on which there was scarcely room for two covers—he felt quite upset, almost sick, in fact, at the sight presented by the *table d'hôte*, which his glance now enfiladed from end to end. People had been eating at it for an hour already, two sets of customers had followed one upon the other, and the covers were strewn about in higgledy-piggledy

fashion. On the cloth were numerous stains of wine and sauce, while there was no symmetry even in the arrangement of the glass fruit-stands, which formed the only decorations of the table. And one's astonishment increased at sight of the motley mob which was collected there—huge priests, scraggy girls, mothers overflowing with superfluous fat, gentlemen with red faces, and families ranged in rows and displaying all the pitiable, increasing ugliness of successive generations. All these people were perspiring, greedily swallowing, seated slantwise, lacking room to move their arms, and unable even to use their hands deftly. And amidst this display of appetite, increased tenfold by fatigue, and of eager haste to fill one's stomach in order to return to the Grotto more quickly, there was a corpulent ecclesiastic who in no wise hurried, but ate of every dish with prudent slowness, crunching his food with a ceaseless, dignified movement of the jaws.

"*Fichtre!*" exclaimed M. de Guersaint, "it is by no means cool in here. All the same, I shall be glad of something to eat, for I 've felt a sinking in the stomach ever since I have been at Lourdes. And you—are you hungry?"

"Yes, yes, I shall eat," replied Pierre, though, truth to tell, he felt quite upset.

The *menu* was a copious one. There was salmon, an omelet, mutton cutlets with mashed potatoes, stewed kidneys, cauliflowers, cold meats, and apricot tarts—everything cooked too much, and swimming in sauce which, but for its grittiness, would have been flavourless. However, there was some fairly fine

fruit on the glass stands, particularly some peaches. And, besides, the people did not seem at all difficult to please ; they apparently had no palates, for there was no sign of nausea. Hemmed in between an old priest and a dirty, full-bearded man, a girl of delicate build, who looked very pretty with her soft eyes and silken skin, was eating some kidneys with an expression of absolute beatitude, although the so-called "sauce" in which they swam was simply greyish water.

"Hum!" resumed even M. de Guersaint, "this salmon is not so bad. Add a little salt to it and you will find it all right."

Pierre made up his mind to eat, for after all he must take sustenance for strength's sake. At a little table close by, however, he had just caught sight of Madame Vigneron and Madame Chaise, who sat face to face, apparently waiting. And indeed, M. Vigneron and his son Gustave soon appeared, the latter still pale, and leaning more heavily than usual on his crutch. "Sit down next to your aunt," said his father ; "I will take the chair beside your mother." But just then he perceived his two neighbours, and stepping up to them, he added : "Oh! he is now all right again. I have been rubbing him with some eau-de-Cologne, and by-and-by he will be able to take his bath at the piscina."

Thereupon M. Vigneron sat down and began to devour. But what an awful fright he had had! He again began talking of it aloud, despite himself, so intense had been his terror at the thought that the lad might go off before his aunt. The latter related that

whilst she was kneeling at the Grotto the day before, she had experienced a sudden feeling of relief; in fact, she flattered herself that she was cured of her heart complaint, and began giving precise particulars, to which her brother-in-law listened with dilated eyes, full of involuntary anxiety. Most certainly he was a good-natured man, he had never desired anybody's death; only he felt indignant at the idea that the Virgin might cure this old woman, and forget his son, who was so young. Talking and eating, he had got to the cutlets, and was swallowing the mashed potatoes by the forkful, when he fancied he could detect that Madame Chaise was sulking with her nephew. "Gustave," he suddenly inquired, "have you asked your aunt's forgiveness?" The lad, quite astonished, began staring at his father with his large clear eyes. "Yes," added M. Vigneron, "you behaved very badly, you pushed her back just now when she wanted to help you to sit up."

Madame Chaise said nothing, but waited with a dignified air, whilst Gustave, who, without any show of appetite, was finishing the *noix* of his cutlet, which had been cut into small pieces, remained with his eyes lowered on his plate, this time obstinately refusing to make the sorry show of affection which was demanded of him.

"Come, Gustave," resumed his father, "be a good boy. You know how kind your aunt is, and all that she intends to do for you."

But no, he would not yield. At that moment, indeed, he really hated that woman, who did not die quickly enough, who polluted the affection of his

parents, to such a point that when he saw them surround him with attentions he no longer knew whether it were himself or the inheritance which his life represented that they wished to save. However, Madame Vigneron, so dignified in her demeanour, came to her husband's help. "You really grieve me, Gustave," said she; "ask your aunt's forgiveness, or you will make me quite angry with you."

Thereupon he gave way. What was the use of resisting? Was it not better that his parents should obtain that money? Would he not himself die later on, so as to suit the family convenience? He was aware of all that; he understood everything, even when not a word was spoken. So keen was the sense of hearing with which suffering had endowed him, that he even heard the others' thoughts.

"I beg your pardon, aunt," he said, "for not having behaved well to you just now."

Then two big tears rolled from his eyes, whilst he smiled with the air of a tender-hearted man who has seen too much of life and can no longer be deceived by anything. Madame Chaise at once kissed him and told him that she was not at all angry. And the Vignerons' delight in living was displayed in all candour.

"If the kidneys are not up to much," M. de Guersaint now said to Pierre, "here at all events are some cauliflowers with a good flavour."

The formidable mastication was still going on around them. Pierre had never seen such an amount of eating, amidst such perspiration, in an atmosphere as stifling as that of a washhouse full of

hot steam. The odour of the victuals seemed to thicken into a kind of smoke. You had to shout to make yourself heard, for everybody was talking in loud tones, and the scared waiters raised a fearful clatter in changing the plates and forks ; not to mention the noise of all the jaw-crunching, a mill-like grinding which was distinctly audible. What most hurt the feelings of the young priest, however, was the extraordinary promiscuity of the *table d'hôte*, at which men and women, young girls and ecclesiastics, were packed together in chance order, and satisfied their hunger like a pack of hounds snapping at offal in all haste. Baskets of bread went round and were promptly emptied. And there was a perfect massacre of cold meats, all the remnants of the victuals of the day before, leg of mutton, veal, and ham, encompassed by a fallen mass of transparent jelly which quivered like soft glue. They had all eaten too much already, but these viands seemed to whet their appetites afresh, as though the idea had come to them that nothing whatever ought to be left. The fat priest in the middle of the table, who had shown himself such a capital knife-and-fork, was now lingering over the fruit, having just got to his third peach, a huge one, which he slowly peeled and swallowed in slices with an air of compunction.

All at once, however, the whole room was thrown into agitation. A waiter had come in and begun distributing the letters which Madame Majesté had finished sorting. "Hallo!" exclaimed M. Vigneron ; "a letter for me! This is surprising—I did not give my address to anybody." Then, at a sudden recol-

lection, he added, "Yes I did, though; this must have come from Sauvageot, who is filling my place at the Ministry." He opened the letter, his hands began to tremble, and suddenly he raised a cry: "The chief clerk is dead!"

Deeply agitated, Madame Vigneron was also unable to bridle her tongue: "Then you will have the appointment!"

This was the secret dream in which they had so long and so fondly indulged: the chief clerk's death, in order that he, Vigneron, assistant chief clerk for ten years past, might at last rise to the supreme post, the bureaucratic marshalship. And so great was his delight that he cast aside all restraint. "Ah! the Blessed Virgin is certainly protecting me, my dear. Only this morning I again prayed to her for a rise, and, you see, she grants my prayer!"

However, finding Madame Chaise's eyes fixed upon his own, and seeing Gustave smile, he realised that he ought not to exult in this fashion. Each member of the family no doubt thought of his or her interests and prayed to the Blessed Virgin for such personal favours as might be desired. And so, again putting on his good-natured air, he resumed: "I mean that the Blessed Virgin takes an interest in every one of us and will send us all home well satisfied. Ah! the poor chief, I 'm sorry for him. I shall have to send my card to his widow."

In spite of all his efforts he could not restrain his exultation, and no longer doubted that his most secret desires, those which he did not even confess to himself, would soon be gratified. And so all

honour was done to the apricot tarts, even Gustave being allowed to eat a portion of one.

"It is surprising," now remarked M. de Guersaint, who had just ordered a cup of coffee; "it is surprising that one does n't see more sick people here. All these folks seem to me to have first-rate appetites."

After a close inspection, however, in addition to Gustave, who ate no more than a little chicken, he ended by finding a man with a goître seated at the *table d'hôte* between two women, one of whom certainly suffered from cancer. Farther on, too, there was a girl so thin and pale that she must surely be a consumptive. And still farther away there was a female idiot who had made her entry leaning on two relatives, and with expressionless eyes and lifeless features was now carrying her food to her mouth with a spoon, and slobbering over her napkin. Perhaps there were yet other ailing ones present who could not be distinguished among all those noisy appetites, ailing ones whom the journey had braced, and who were eating as they had not eaten for a long time past. The apricot tarts, the cheese, the fruits were all engulfed amidst the increasing disorder of the table, where at last there only remained the stains of all the wine and sauce which had been spilt upon the cloth.

It was nearly noon. "We will go back to the Grotto at once, eh?" said M. Vigneron.

Indeed, "To the Grotto! To the Grotto!" were well-nigh the only words you now heard. The full mouths were eagerly masticating and swallowing, in

order that they might repeat prayers and hymns again with all speed. "Well, as we have the whole afternoon before us," declared M. de Guersaint, "I suggest that we should visit the town a little. I want to see also if I can get a conveyance for my excursion, as my daughter so particularly wishes me to make it."

Pierre, who was stifling, was glad indeed to leave the dining-room. In the porch he was able to breathe again, though even there he found a torrent of customers, new arrivals who were waiting for places. No sooner did one of the little tables become vacant than its possession was eagerly contested, whilst the smallest gap at the *table d'hôte* was instantly filled up. In this wise the assault would continue for more than another hour, and again would the different courses of the *menu* appear in procession, to be engulfed amidst the crunching of jaws, the stifling heat, and the growing nausea.

II

THE "ORDINARY."

WHEN Pierre and M. de Guersaint got outside they began walking slowly amidst the ever-growing stream of the Sundayfied crowd. The sky was a bright blue, the sun warmed the whole town, and there was a festive gaiety in the atmosphere, the keen delight that attends those great fairs which bring entire communities into the open air. When they had descended the crowded footway of the Avenue de la Grotte, and had reached the corner of the Plateau de la Merlasse, they found their way barred by a throng which was flowing backward amidst a block of vehicles and stamping of horses. "There is no hurry, however," remarked M. de Guersaint. "My idea is to go as far as the Place du Marcadal in the old town; for the servant girl at the hotel told me of a hairdresser there whose brother lets out conveyances cheaply. Do you mind going so far?"

"I?" replied Pierre. "Go wherever you like, I 'll follow you."

"All right—and I 'll profit by the opportunity to have a shave."

They were nearing the Place du Rosaire, and found themselves in front of the lawns stretching to the Gave, when an encounter again stopped them. Mesdames Désagneaux and Raymonde de Jonquière were here, chatting gaily with Gérard de Peyrelongue. Both women wore light-coloured gowns, seaside dresses as it were, and their white silk parasols shone in the bright sunlight. They imparted, so to say, a pretty note to the scene—a touch of society chatter blended with the fresh laughter of youth.

"No, no," Madame Désagneaux was saying, "we certainly can't go and visit your 'ordinary' like that—at the very moment when all your comrades are eating."

Gérard, however, with a very gallant air, insisted on their accompanying him, turning more particularly towards Raymonde, whose somewhat massive face was that day brightened by the radiant charm of health.

"But it is a very curious sight, I assure you," said the young man, "and you would be very respectfully received. Trust yourself to me, mademoiselle. Besides, we should certainly find M. Berthaud there, and he would be delighted to do you the honours."

Raymonde smiled, her clear eyes plainly saying that she was quite agreeable. And just then, as Pierre and M. de Guersaint drew near in order to present their respects to the ladies, they were made acquainted with the question under discussion. The "ordinary" was a kind of restaurant or *table d'hôte*

which the members of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Salvation—the bearers, the hospitallers of the Grotto, the piscinas, and the hospitals—had established among themselves with the view of taking their meals together at small cost. Many of them were not rich, for they were recruited among all classes; however, they had contrived to secure three good meals for the daily payment of three francs apiece. And in fact they soon had provisions to spare and distributed them among the poor. Everything was in their own management; they purchased their own supplies, recruited a cook and a few waiters, and did not disdain to lend a hand themselves, in order that everything might be comfortable and orderly.

"It must be very interesting," said M. de Guersaint, when these explanations had been given him. "Let us go and see it, if we are not in the way."

Little Madame Désagneaux thereupon gave her consent. "Well, if we are going in a party," said she, "I am quite willing. But when this gentleman first proposed to take Raymonde and me, I was afraid that it might not be quite proper."

Then, as she began to laugh, the others followed her example. She had accepted M. de Guersaint's arm, and Pierre walked beside her on the other hand, experiencing a sudden feeling of sympathy for this gay little woman, who was so full of life and so charming with her fair frizzy hair and creamy complexion.

Behind them came Raymonde, leaning upon Gérard's arm and talking to him in the calm, staid

voice of a young lady who holds the best principles despite her air of heedless youth. And since here was the husband whom she had so often dreamt of, she resolved that she would this time secure him, make him beyond all question her own. She intoxicated him with the perfume of health and youth which she diffused, and at the same time astonished him by her knowledge of housewifely duties and of the manner in which money may be economised even in the most trifling matters; for having questioned him with regard to the purchases which he and his comrades made for their "ordinary," she proceeded to show him that they might have reduced their expenditure still further.

Meantime M. de Guersaint and Madame Désagneaux were also chatting together: "You must be fearfully tired, madame," said the architect.

But with a gesture of revolt, and an exclamation of genuine anger, she replied: "Oh no, indeed! Last night, it is true, fatigue quite overcame me at the hospital; I sat down and dozed off, and Madame de Jonquière and the other ladies were good enough to let me sleep on." At this the others again began to laugh; but still with the same angry air she continued: "And so I slept like a log until this morning. It was disgraceful, especially as I had sworn that I would remain up all night." Then, merriment gaining upon her in her turn, she suddenly burst into a sonorous laugh, displaying her beautiful white teeth. "Ah! a pretty nurse I am, and no mistake! It was poor Madame de Jonquière who had to remain on her legs all the time. I tried to

coax her to come out with us just now. But she preferred to take a little rest."

Raymonde, who overheard these words, thereupon raised her voice to say: "Yes, indeed, my poor mamma could no longer keep on her feet. It was I who compelled her to lie down, telling her that she could go to sleep without any uneasiness, for we should get on all right without her——"

So saying, the girl gave Gérard a laughing glance. He even fancied that he could detect a faint squeeze of the fresh round arm which was resting on his own, as though, indeed, she had wished to express her happiness at being alone with him so that they might settle their own affairs without any interference. This quite delighted him; and he began to explain that if he had not had *déjeuner* with his comrades that day, it was because some friends had invited him to join them at the railway-station refreshment-room at ten o'clock, and had not given him his liberty until after the departure of the eleven-thirty train.

"Ah! the rascals!" he suddenly resumed. "Do you hear them, mademoiselle?"

The little party was now nearing its destination, and the uproarious laughter and chatter of youth rang out from a clump of trees which concealed the old zinc and plaster building in which the "ordinary" was installed. Gérard began by taking the visitors into the kitchen, a very spacious apartment, well fitted up, and containing a huge range and an immense table, to say nothing of numerous gigantic cauldrons. Here, moreover, the young man called

the attention of his companions to the circumstance that the cook, a fat, jovial-looking man, had the red cross pinned on his white jacket, being himself a member of the pilgrimage. Then, pushing open a door, Gérard invited his friends to enter the common room.

It was a long apartment containing two rows of plain deal tables; and the only other articles of furniture were numerous rush-seated tavern chairs, with an additional table which served as a sideboard. The whitewashed walls and the flooring of shiny, red tiles looked, however, extremely clean amidst this intentional bareness, which was similar to that of a monkish refectory. But the feature of the place which more particularly struck you, as you crossed the threshold, was the childish gaiety which reigned there; for, packed together at the tables, were a hundred and fifty hospitallers of all ages, eating with splendid appetites, laughing, applauding, and singing, with their mouths full. A wondrous fraternity united these men, who had flocked to Lourdes from every province of France, and who belonged to all classes, and represented every degree of fortune. Many of them knew nothing of one another, save that they met here and elbowed one another during three days every year, living together like brothers, and then going off and remaining in absolute ignorance of each other during the rest of the twelvemonth. Nothing could be more charming, however, than to meet again at the next pilgrimage, united in the same charitable work, and to spend a few days of hard labour and boyish delight in common once

more ; for it all became, as it were, an "outing" of a number of big fellows, let loose under a lovely sky, and well pleased to be able to enjoy themselves and laugh together. And even the frugality of the table, with the pride of managing things themselves, of eating the provisions which they had purchased and cooked, added to the general good humour.

"You see," explained Gérard, "we are not at all inclined to be sad, although we have so much hard work to get through. The Hospitality numbers more than three hundred members, but there are only about one hundred and fifty here at a time, for we have had to organise two successive services, so that there may always be some of us on duty at the Grotto and the hospitals.

The sight of the little party of visitors assembled on the threshold of the room seemed to have increased the general delight ; and Berthaud, the superintendent of the bearers, who was lunching at the head of one of the tables, gallantly rose up to receive the ladies.

"But it smells very nice," exclaimed Madame Désagneaux in her giddy way. "Won't you invite us to come and taste your cookery to-morrow ?"

"Oh ! we can't ask ladies," replied Berthaud, laughing. "But if you gentlemen would like to join us to-morrow we should be extremely pleased to entertain you."

He had at once noticed the good understanding which prevailed between Gérard and Raymonde, and seemed delighted at it, for he greatly wished his cousin to make this match. He laughed pleasantly

at the enthusiastic gaiety which the young girl displayed as she began to question him. "Is not that the Marquis de Salmon-Roquebert," she asked, "who is sitting over yonder between those two young men who look like shop assistants?"

"They are, in fact, the sons of a small stationer at Tarbes," replied Berthaud; "and that is really the Marquis, your neighbour of the Rue de Lille, the owner of that magnificent mansion, one of the richest and most noble men of title in France. You see how he is enjoying our mutton stew!"

It was true, the millionaire Marquis seemed delighted to be able to board himself for his three francs a day, and to sit down at table in genuine democratic fashion by the side of petty *bourgeois* and workmen who would not have dared to accost him in the street. Was not that chance table symbolical of social communion, effected by the joint practice of charity? For his part, the Marquis was the more hungry that day, as he had bathed over sixty patients, sufferers from all the most abominable diseases of unhappy humanity, at the piscinas that morning. And the scene around him seemed like a realisation of the evangelical commonalty; but doubtless it was so charming and so gay simply because its duration was limited to three days.

Although M. de Guersaint had but lately risen from table, his curiosity prompted him to taste the mutton stew, and he pronounced it perfect. Meantime, Pierre caught sight of Baron Suire, the director of the Hospitality, walking about between the rows of tables with an air of some importance, as though

he had allotted himself the task of keeping an eye on everything, even on the manner in which his staff fed itself. The young priest thereupon remembered the ardent desire which Marie had expressed to spend the night in front of the Grotto, and it occurred to him that the Baron might be willing to give the necessary authorisation.

"Certainly," replied the director, who had become quite grave whilst listening to Pierre, "we do sometimes allow it; but it is always a very delicate matter! You assure me at all events that this young person is not consumptive? Well, well, since you say that she so much desires it I will mention the matter to Father Fourcade and warn Madame de Jonquière, so that she may let you take the young lady away."

He was in reality a very good-natured fellow, albeit so fond of assuming the air of an indispensable man weighed down by the heaviest responsibilities. In his turn he now detained the visitors, and gave them full particulars concerning the organisation of the Hospitality. Its members said prayers together every morning. Two board meetings were held each day, and were attended by all the heads of departments, as well as by the reverend Fathers and some of the chaplains. All the hospitallers took the Sacrament as frequently as possible. And, moreover, there were many complicated tasks to be attended to, a prodigious rotation of duties, quite a little world to be governed with a firm hand. The Baron spoke like a general who each year gains a great victory over the spirit of the age; and, sending Berthaud

back to finish his *déjeuner*, he insisted on escorting the ladies into the little sanded courtyard, which was shaded by some fine trees.

"It is very interesting, very interesting," repeated Madame Désagneaux. "We are greatly obliged to you for your kindness, monsieur."

"Don't mention it, don't mention it, madame," answered the Baron. "It is I who am pleased at having had an opportunity to show you my little army."

So far Gérard had not quitted Raymonde's side; but M. de Guersaint and Pierre were already exchanging glances suggestive of leave-taking, in order that they might repair by themselves to the Place du Marcadal, when Madame Désagneaux suddenly remembered that a friend had requested her to send her a bottle of Lourdes water. And she thereupon asked Gérard how she was to execute this commission. The young man began to laugh. "Will you again accept me as a guide?" said he. "And by the way, if these gentlemen like to come as well, I will show you the place where the bottles are filled, corked, packed in cases, and then sent off. It is a curious sight."

M. de Guersaint immediately consented; and all five of them set out again, Madame Désagneaux still between the architect and the priest, whilst Raymonde and Gérard brought up the rear. The crowd in the burning sunlight was increasing; the Place du Rosaire was now overflowing with an idle sauntering mob resembling some concourse of sight-seers on a day of public rejoicing.

The bottling and packing shops were situated under one of the arches on the left-hand side of the Place. They formed a suite of three apartments of very simple aspect. In the first one the bottles were filled in the most ordinary of fashions. A little green-painted zinc barrel, not unlike a watering-cask, was dragged by a man from the Grotto, and the light-coloured bottles were then simply filled at its tap, one by one; the blouse-clad workman entrusted with the duty exercising no particular watchfulness to prevent the water from overflowing. In fact there was quite a puddle of it upon the ground. There were no labels on the bottles; the little leaden capsules placed over the corks alone bore an inscription, and they were coated with a kind of ceruse, doubtless to ensure preservation. Then came two other rooms which formed regular packing shops, with carpenters' benches, tools, and heaps of shavings. The boxes, most frequently made for one bottle or for two, were put together with great care, and the bottles were deposited inside them, on beds of fine wood parings. The scene reminded one in some degree of the packing halls for flowers at Nice and for preserved fruits at Grasse.

Gérard went on giving explanations with a quiet, satisfied air. "The water," he said, "really comes from the Grotto, as you can yourselves see, so that all the foolish jokes which one hears really have no basis. And everything is perfectly simple, natural, and goes on in the broad daylight. I would also point out to you that the Fathers don't sell the water as they are accused of doing. For instance, a bottle

of water here costs twenty centimes,[1] which is only the price of the bottle itself. If you wish to have it sent to anybody you naturally have to pay for the packing and the carriage, and then it costs you one franc and seventy centimes.[2] However, you are perfectly at liberty to go to the source and fill the flasks and cans and other receptacles that you may choose to bring with you."

Pierre reflected that the profits of the reverend Fathers in this respect could not be very large ones, for their gains were limited to what they made by manufacturing the boxes and supplying the bottles, which latter, purchased by the thousand, certainly did not cost them so much as twenty centimes apiece. However, Raymonde and Madame Désagneaux, as well as M. de Guersaint, who had such a lively imagination, experienced deep disappointment at sight of the little green barrel, the capsules, sticky with ceruse, and the piles of shavings lying around the benches. They had doubtless imagined all sorts of ceremonies, the observance of certain rites in bottling the miraculous water, priests in vestments pronouncing blessings, and choir-boys singing hymns of praise in pure crystalline voices. For his part, Pierre, in presence of all this vulgar bottling and packing, ended by thinking of the active power of faith. When one of those bottles reaches some far-away sick-room, and is unpacked there, and the sufferer falls upon his knees, and so excites himself by contemplating and drinking the pure water that he

[1] Four cents, U. S. A.

[2] About 32 cents, U. S. A.

actually brings about the cure of his ailment, there must truly be a most extraordinary plunge into all-powerful illusion.

"Ah!" exclaimed Gérard as they came out, "would you like to see the storehouse where the tapers are kept, before going to the offices? It is only a couple of steps away."

And then, not even waiting for their answer, he led them to the opposite side of the Place du Rosaire. His one desire was to amuse Raymonde, but, in point of fact, the aspect of the place where the tapers were stored was even less entertaining than that of the packing-rooms which they had just left. This storehouse, a kind of deep vault under one of the right-hand arches of the Place, was divided by timber into a number of spacious compartments, in which lay an extraordinary collection of tapers, classified according to size. The overplus of all the tapers offered to the Grotto was deposited here; and such was the number of these superfluous candles that the little conveyances stationed near the Grotto railing, ready to receive the pilgrims' offerings, had to be brought to the storehouse several times a day in order to be emptied there, after which they were returned to the Grotto, and were promptly filled again. In theory, each taper that was offered ought to have been burnt at the feet of the Virgin's statue; but so great was the number of these offerings, that, although a couple of hundred tapers of all sizes were kept burning by day and night, it was impossible to exhaust the supply, which went on increasing and increasing. There was a rumour

that the Fathers could not even find room to store all this wax, but had to sell it over and over again ; and, indeed, certain friends of the Grotto confessed, with a touch of pride, that the profit on the tapers alone would have sufficed to defray all the expenses of the business.

The quantity of these votive candles quite stupefied Raymonde and Madame Désagneaux. How many, how many there were ! The smaller ones, costing from fifty centimes to a franc apiece, were piled up in fabulous numbers. M. de Guersaint, desirous of getting at the exact figures, quite lost himself in the puzzling calculation he attempted. As for Pierre, it was in silence that he gazed upon this mass of wax, destined to be burnt in open daylight to the glory of God ; and although he was by no means a rigid utilitarian, and could well understand that some apparent acts of extravagance yield an illusive enjoyment and satisfaction which provide humanity with as much sustenance as bread, he could not, on the other hand, refrain from reflecting on the many benefits which might have been conferred on the poor and the ailing with the money represented by all that wax, which would fly away in smoke.

" But come, what about that bottle which I am to send off ? " abruptly asked Madame Désagneaux.

" We will go to the office," replied Gérard. " In five minutes everything will be settled."

They had to cross the Place du Rosaire once more and ascend the stone stairway leading to the Basilica. The office was up above, on the left hand, at the

corner of the path leading to the Calvary. The building was a paltry one, a hut of lath and plaster which the wind and the rain had reduced to a state of ruin. On a board outside was the inscription: "Apply here with reference to Masses, Offerings, and Brotherhoods. Forwarding office for Lourdes water. Subscriptions to the 'Annals of O. L. of Lourdes.'" How many millions of people must have already passed through this wretched shanty, which seemed to date from the innocent days when the foundations of the adjacent Basilica had scarcely been laid!

The whole party went in, eager to see what might be inside. But they simply found a wicket at which Madame Désagneaux had to stop in order to give her friend's name and address; and when she had paid one franc and seventy centimes, a small printed receipt was handed her, such as you receive on registering luggage at a railway station.

As soon as they were outside again Gérard pointed to a large building standing two or three hundred yards away, and resumed: "There, that is where the Fathers reside."

"But we see nothing of them," remarked Pierre.

This observation so astonished the young man that he remained for a moment without replying. "It 's true," he at last said, "we do not see them, but then they give up the custody of everything—the Grotto and all the rest—to the Fathers of the Assumption during the national pilgrimage."

Pierre looked at the building which had been pointed out to him, and noticed that it was a massive

stone pile resembling a fortress. The windows were closed, and the whole edifice looked lifeless. Yet everything at Lourdes came from it, and to it also everything returned. It seemed, in fact, to the young priest that he could hear the silent, formidable rake-stroke which extended over the entire valley, which caught hold of all who had come to the spot, and placed both the gold and the blood of the throng in the clutches of those reverend Fathers! However, Gérard just then resumed in a low voice: "But come, they do show themselves, for here is the reverend superior, Father Capdebarthe himself."

An ecclesiastic was indeed just passing, a man with the appearance of a peasant, a knotty frame, and a large head which looked as though carved with a billhook. His opaque eyes were quite expressionless, and his face, with its worn features, had retained a loamy tint, a gloomy, russet reflection of the earth. Monseigneur Laurence had really made a politic selection in confiding the organisation and management of the Grotto to those Garaison missionaries, who were so tenacious and covetous, for the most part sons of mountain peasants and passionately attached to the soil.

However, the little party now slowly retraced its steps by way of the Plateau de la Merlasse, the broad boulevard which skirts the inclined way on the left hand and leads to the Avenue de la Grotte. It was already past one o'clock, but people were still eating their *déjeuners* from one to the other end of the overflowing town. Many of the fifty thousand pilgrims and sight-seers collected within it had not yet been

able to sit down and eat; and Pierre, who had left the *table d'hôte* still crowded, who had just seen the hospitallers squeezing together so gaily at the "ordinary," found more and more tables at each step he took. On all sides people were eating, eating without a pause. Hereabouts, however, in the open air, on either side of the broad road, the hungry ones were humble folk who had rushed upon the tables set up on either footway—tables formed of a couple of long boards, flanked by two forms, and shaded from the sun by narrow linen awnings. Broth and coffee were sold at these places at a penny a cup. The little loaves heaped up in high baskets also cost a penny apiece. Hanging from the poles which upheld the awnings were sausages, chitterlings, and hams. Some of the open-air *restaurateurs* were frying potatoes, and others were concocting more or less savoury messes of inferior meat and onions. A pungent smoke, a violent odour, arose into the sunlight, mingling with the dust which was raised by the continuous tramp of the promenaders. Rows of people, moreover, were waiting at each cantine, so that each time a party rose from table fresh customers took possession of the benches ranged beside the oilcloth-covered planks, which were so narrow that there was scarcely room for two bowls of soup to be placed side by side. And one and all made haste, and devoured with the ravenous hunger born of their fatigue, that insatiable appetite which so often follows upon great moral shocks. In fact, when the mind had exhausted itself in prayer, when everything physical had been forgotten amidst the mental flight into the legendary

heavens, the human animal suddenly appeared, again asserted itself, and began to gorge. Moreover, under that dazzling Sunday sky, the scene was like that of a fair-field with all the gluttony of a merry-making community, a display of the delight which they felt in living, despite the multiplicity of their abominable ailments and the dearth of the miracles they hoped for.

"They eat, they amuse themselves; what else can one expect?" remarked Gérard, guessing the thoughts of his amiable companions.

"Ah! poor people!" murmured Pierre, "they have a perfect right to do so."

He was greatly touched to see human nature reassert itself in this fashion. However, when they had got to the lower part of the boulevard near the Grotto, his feelings were hurt at sight of the desperate eagerness displayed by the female vendors of tapers and bouquets, who with the rough fierceness of conquerors assailed the passers-by in bands. They were mostly young women, with bare heads, or with kerchiefs tied over their hair, and they displayed extraordinary effrontery. Even the old ones were scarcely more discreet. With parcels of tapers under their arms, they brandished the one which they offered for sale and even thrust it into the hand of the promenader. "Monsieur," "madame," they called, "buy a taper, buy a taper, it will bring you luck!" One gentleman, who was surrounded and shaken by three of the youngest of these harpies, almost lost the skirts of his frock-coat in attempting to escape their clutches. Then the scene began

afresh with the bouquets—large round bouquets they were, carelessly fastened together and looking like cabbages. "A bouquet, madame!" was the cry. "A bouquet for the Blessed Virgin!" If the lady escaped, she heard muttered insults behind her. Trafficking, impudent trafficking, pursued the pilgrims to the very outskirts of the Grotto. Trade was not merely triumphantly installed in every one of the shops, standing close together and transforming each street into a bazaar, but it overran the footways and barred the road with hand-carts full of chaplets, medals, statuettes, and religious prints. On all sides people were buying almost to the same extent as they ate, in order that they might take away with them some souvenir of this holy Kermesse. And the bright gay note of this commercial eagerness, this scramble of hawkers, was supplied by the urchins who rushed about through the crowd, crying the "Journal de la Grotte." Their sharp, shrill voices pierced the ear: "The 'Journal de la Grotte,' this morning's number, two sous, the 'Journal de la Grotte.'"

Amidst the continual pushing which accompanied the eddying of the ever-moving crowd, Gérard's little party became separated. He and Raymonde remained behind the others. They had begun talking together in low tones, with an air of smiling intimacy, lost and isolated as they were in the dense crowd. And Madame Désagneaux at last had to stop, look back, and call to them: "Come on, or we shall lose one another!"

As they drew near, Pierre heard the girl exclaim:

"Mamma is so very busy; speak to her before we leave." And Gérard thereupon replied: "It is understood. You have made me very happy, mademoiselle."

Thus the husband had been secured, the marriage decided upon, during this charming promenade among the sights of Lourdes. Raymonde had completed her conquest, and Gérard had at last taken a resolution, realising how gay and sensible she was, as she walked beside him leaning on his arm.

M. de Guersaint, however, had raised his eyes, and was heard inquiring: "Are not those people up there, on that balcony, the rich folk who made the journey in the same train as ourselves?—You know whom I mean, that lady who is so very ill, and whose husband and sister accompany her?"

He was alluding to the Dieulafays; and they indeed were the persons whom he now saw on the balcony of a suite of rooms which they had rented in a new house overlooking the lawns of the Rosary. They here occupied a first-floor, furnished with all the luxury that Lourdes could provide, carpets, hangings, mirrors, and many other things, without mentioning a staff of servants despatched beforehand from Paris. As the weather was so fine that afternoon, the large armchair on which lay the poor ailing woman had been rolled on to the balcony. You could see her there, clad in a lace *peignoir*. Her husband, always correctly attired in a black frock-coat, stood beside her on her right hand, whilst her sister, in a delightful pale mauve gown, sat on her left smiling and leaning over every now and then

so as to speak to her, but apparently receiving no reply.

"Oh!" declared little Madame Désagneaux, "I have often heard people speak of Madame Jousseur, that lady in mauve. She is the wife of a diplomatist who neglects her, it seems, in spite of her great beauty; and last year there was a deal of talk about her fancy for a young colonel who is well known in Parisian society. It is said, however, in Catholic *salons* that her religious principles enabled her to conquer it."

They all five remained there, looking up at the balcony. "To think," resumed Madame Désagneaux, "that her sister, poor woman, was once her living portrait. And, indeed, there was an expression of greater kindliness and more gentle gaiety on Madame Dieulafay's face. And now you see her—no different from a dead woman except that she is above instead of under ground—with her flesh wasted away, reduced to a livid, boneless thing which they scarcely dare to move. Ah! the unhappy woman!"

Raymonde thereupon assured the others that Madame Dieulafay, who had been married scarcely two years previously, had brought all the jewellery given her on the occasion of her wedding to offer it as a gift to Our Lady of Lourdes; and Gérard confirmed this assertion, saying that the jewellery had been handed over to the treasurer of the Basilica that very morning with a golden lantern studded with gems and a large sum of money destined for the relief of the poor. However, the Blessed Virgin could not

have been touched as yet, for the sufferer's condition seemed, if anything, to be worse.

From that moment Pierre no longer beheld aught save that young woman on that handsome balcony, that woeful, wealthy creature lying there high above the merrymaking throng, the Lourdes mob which was feasting and laughing in the Sunday sunshine. The two dear ones who were so tenderly watching over her—her sister who had forsaken her society triumphs, her husband who had forgotten his financial business, his millions dispersed throughout the world—increased, by their irreproachable demeanour, the woefulness of the group which they thus formed high above all other heads, and face to face with the lovely valley. For Pierre they alone remained; and they were exceedingly wealthy and exceedingly wretched.

However, lingering in this wise on the footway with their eyes upturned, the five promenaders narrowly escaped being knocked down and run over, for at every moment fresh vehicles were coming up, for the most part landaus drawn by four horses, which were driven at a fast trot, and whose bells jingled merrily. The occupants of these carriages were tourists, visitors to the waters of Pau, Barèges, and Cauterets, whom curiosity had attracted to Lourdes, and who were delighted with the fine weather and quite inspirited by their rapid drive across the mountains. They would remain at Lourdes only a few hours; after hastening to the Grotto and the Basilica in seaside costumes, they would start off again, laughing, and well pleased at

having seen it all. In this wise families in light attire, bands of young women with bright parasols, darted hither and thither among the grey, neutral-tinted crowd of pilgrims, imparting to it, in a yet more pronounced manner, the aspect of a fair-day mob, amidst which folks of good society deign to come and amuse themselves.

All at once Madame Désagneaux raised a cry: "What, is it you, Berthe?" And thereupon she embraced a tall, charming brunette who had just alighted from a landau with three other young women, the whole party smiling and animated. Everyone began talking at once, and all sorts of merry exclamations rang out, in the delight they felt at meeting in this fashion. "Oh! we are at Cauterets, my dear," said the tall brunette. "And as everybody comes here, we decided to come all four together. And your husband, is he here with you?"

Madame Désagneaux began protesting: "Of course not," said she. "He is at Trouville, as you ought to know. I shall start to join him on Thursday."

"Yes, yes, of course," resumed the tall brunette, who, like her friend, seemed to be an amiable, giddy creature, "I was forgetting; you are here with the pilgrimage."

Then Madame Désagneaux offered to guide her friends, promising to show them everything of interest in less than a couple of hours; and turning to Raymonde, who stood by, smiling, she added: "Come with us, my dear; your mother won't be anxious."

The ladies and Pierre and M. de Guersaint thereupon exchanged bows: and Gérard also took leave, tenderly pressing Raymonde's hand, with his eyes fixed on hers, as though to pledge himself definitively. The women swiftly departed, directing their steps towards the Grotto, and when Gérard also had gone off, returning to his duties, M. de Guersaint said to Pierre: "And the hairdresser on the Place du Marcadal, I really must go and see him. You will come with me, won't you?"

"Of course I will go wherever you like. I am quite at your disposal as Marie does not need us."

Following the pathways between the large lawns which stretch out in front of the Rosary, they reached the new bridge, where they had another encounter, this time with Abbé des Hermoises, who was acting as guide to two young married ladies who had arrived that morning from Tarbes. Walking between them with the gallant air of a society priest, he was showing them Lourdes and explaining it to them, keeping them well away, however, from its more repugnant features, its poor and its ailing folk, its odour of low misery, which, it must be admitted, had well-nigh disappeared that fine, sunshiny day. At the first word which M. de Guersaint addressed to him with respect to the hiring of a vehicle for the trip to Gavarnie, the Abbé was seized with a dread lest he should be obliged to leave his pretty lady-visitors: "As you please, my dear sir," he replied. "Kindly attend to the matter, and—you are quite right, make the cheapest arrangements possible, for I shall have two ecclesiastics of small means with

me. There will be four of us. Let me know at the hotel this evening at what hour we shall start."

Thereupon he again joined his lady-friends, and led them towards the Grotto, following the shady path which skirts the Gave, a cool, sequestered path well suited for lovers' walks.

Feeling somewhat tired, Pierre had remained apart from the others, leaning against the parapet of the new bridge. And now for the first time he was struck by the prodigious number of priests among the crowd. He saw all varieties of them swarming across the bridge: priests of correct mien who had come with the pilgrimage and who could be recognised by their air of assurance and their clean cassocks; poor village priests who were far more timid and badly clothed, and who, after making sacrifices in order that they might indulge in the journey, would return home quite scared; and, finally, there was the whole crowd of unattached ecclesiastics who had come nobody knew whence, and who enjoyed such absolute liberty that it was difficult to be sure whether they had even said their mass that morning. They doubtless found this liberty very agreeable; and thus the greater number of them, like Abbé des Hermoises, had simply come on a holiday excursion, free from all duties, and happy at being able to live like ordinary men, lost, unnoticed as they were in the multitude around them. And from the young, carefully groomed and perfumed priest, to the old one in a dirty cassock and shoes down at heel, the entire species had its representative in the throng—there were corpulent ones, others but moderately fat,

thin ones, tall ones and short ones, some whom faith had brought and whom ardour was consuming, some also who simply plied their calling like worthy men, and some, moreover, who were fond of intriguing, and who were only present in order that they might help the good cause. However, Pierre was quite surprised to see such a stream of priests pass before him, each with his special passion, and one and all hurrying to the Grotto as one hurries to a duty, a belief, a pleasure, or a task. He noticed one among the number, a very short, slim, dark man with a pronounced Italian accent, whose glittering eyes seemed to be taking a plan of Lourdes, who looked, indeed, like one of those spies who come and peer around with a view to conquest; and then he observed another one, an enormous fellow with a paternal air, who was breathing hard through inordinate eating, and who paused in front of a poor sick woman, and ended by slipping a five-franc piece into her hand.

Just then, however, M. de Guersaint returned: "We merely have to go down the boulevard and the Rue Basse," said he.

Pierre followed him without answering. He had just felt his cassock on his shoulders for the first time that afternoon, for never had it seemed so light to him as whilst he was walking about amidst the scramble of the pilgrimage. The young fellow was now living in a state of mingled unconsciousness and dizziness, ever hoping that faith would fall upon him like a lightning flash, in spite of all the vague uneasiness which was growing within him at sight of the things

which he beheld. However, the spectacle of that ever-swelling stream of priests no longer wounded his heart; fraternal feelings towards these unknown colleagues had returned to him; how many of them there must be who believed no more than he did himself, and yet, like himself, honestly fulfilled their mission as guides and consolers!

"This boulevard is a new one, you know," said M. de Guersaint, all at once raising his voice. "The number of houses built during the last twenty years is almost beyond belief. There is quite a new town here."

The Lapaca flowed along behind the buildings on their right and, their curiosity inducing them to turn into a narrow lane, they came upon some strange old structures on the margin of the narrow stream. Several ancient mills here displayed their wheels; among them one which Monseigneur Laurence had given to Bernadette's parents after the apparitions. Tourists, moreover, were here shown the pretended abode of Bernadette, a hovel whither the Soubirous family had removed on leaving the Rue des Petits Fossés, and in which the young girl, as she was already boarding with the Sisters of Nevers, can have but seldom slept. At last, by way of the Rue Basse, Pierre and his companion reached the Place du Marcadal.

This was a long, triangular, open space, the most animated and luxurious of the squares of the old town, the one where the cafés, the chemists', all the finest shops were situated. And, among the latter, one showed conspicuously, coloured as it was a lively

green, adorned with lofty mirrors, and surmounted by a broad board bearing in gilt letters the inscription: "Cazaban, Hairdresser."

M. de Guersaint and Pierre went in, but there was nobody in the salon and they had to wait. A terrible clatter of forks resounded from the adjoining room, an ordinary dining-room transformed into a *table d'hôte*, in which some twenty people were having *déjeuner* although it was already two o'clock. The afternoon was progressing, and yet people were still eating from one to the other end of Lourdes. Like every other householder in the town, whatever his religious convictions might be, Cazaban, in the pilgrimage season, let his bedrooms, surrendered his dining-room, and sought refuge in his cellar, where, heaped up with his family, he ate and slept, although this unventilated hole was no more than three yards square. However, the passion for trading and money-making carried all before it; at pilgrimage time the whole population disappeared like that of a conquered city, surrendering even the beds of its women and its children to the pilgrims, seating them at its tables, and supplying them with food.

"Is there nobody here?" called M. de Guersaint after waiting a moment.

At last a little man made his appearance, Cazaban himself, a type of the knotty but active Pyrenean, with a long face, prominent cheek-bones, and a sunburned complexion spotted here and there with red. His big, glittering eyes never remained still; and the whole of his spare little figure quivered with incessant exuberance of speech and gesture.

"For you, monsieur—a shave, eh?" said he. "I must beg your pardon for keeping you waiting; but my assistant has gone out, and I was in there with my boarders. If you will kindly sit down, I will attend to you at once."

Thereupon, deigning to operate in person, Cazaban began to stir up the lather and strop the razor. He had glanced rather nervously, however, at the cassock worn by Pierre, who without a word had seated himself in a corner and taken up a newspaper in the perusal of which he appeared to be absorbed.

A short interval of silence followed; but it was fraught with suffering for Cazaban, and whilst lathering his customer's chin he began to chatter: "My boarders lingered this morning such a long time at the Grotto, monsieur, that they have scarcely sat down to *déjeuner*. You can hear them, eh? I was staying with them out of politeness. However, I owe myself to my customers as well, do I not? One must try to please everybody."

M. de Guersaint, who also was fond of a chat, thereupon began to question him: "You lodge some of the pilgrims, I suppose?"

"Oh! we all lodge some of them, monsieur; it is necessary for the town," replied the barber.

"And you accompany them to the Grotto?"

At this, however, Cazaban revolted, and, holding up his razor, he answered with an air of dignity: "Never, monsieur, never! For five years past I have not been in that new town which they are building."

He was still seeking to restrain himself, and again

glanced at Pierre, whose face was hidden by the newspaper. The sight of the red cross pinned on M. de Guersaint's jacket was also calculated to render him prudent; nevertheless his tongue won the victory. "Well, monsieur, opinions are free, are they not?" said he. "I respect yours, but for my part I don't believe in all that phantasmagoria! Oh! I've never concealed it! I was already a republican and a freethinker in the days of the Empire. There were barely four men of those views in the whole town at that time. Oh! I'm proud of it."

He had begun to shave M. de Guersaint's left cheek and was quite triumphant. From that moment a stream of words poured forth from his mouth, a stream which seemed to be inexhaustible. To begin with, he brought the same charges as Majesté against the Fathers of the Grotto. He reproached them for their dealings in tapers, chaplets, prints, and crucifixes, for the disloyal manner in which they competed with those who sold those articles as well as with the hotel and lodging-house keepers. And he was also wrathful with the Blue Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, for had they not robbed him of two tenants, two old ladies, who spent three weeks at Lourdes each year? Moreover you could divine within him all the slowly accumulated, overflowing spite with which the old town regarded the new town—that town which had sprung up so quickly on the other side of the castle, that rich city with houses as big as palaces, whither flowed all the life, all the luxury, all the money of Lourdes, so that it was incessantly growing larger and wealthier, whilst its

elder sister, the poor, antique town of the mountains, with its narrow, grass-grown, deserted streets, seemed near the point of death. Nevertheless the struggle still continued ; the old town seemed determined not to die, and, by lodging pilgrims and opening shops on her side, endeavoured to compel her ungrateful junior to grant her a share of the spoils. But custom only flowed to the shops which were near the Grotto, and only the poorer pilgrims were willing to lodge so far away ; so that the unequal conditions of the struggle intensified the rupture and turned the high town and the low town into two irreconcilable enemies, who preyed upon one another amidst continual intrigues.

" Ah, no ! They certainly won't see me at their Grotto," resumed Cazaban, with his rageful air. " What an abusive use they make of that Grotto of theirs ! They serve it up in every fashion ! To think of such idolatry, such gross superstition in the nineteenth century ! Just ask them if they have cured a single sufferer belonging to the town during the last twenty years ! Yet there are plenty of infirm people crawling about our streets. It was our folk that benefited by the first miracles ; but it would seem that the miraculous water has long lost all its power, so far as we are concerned. We are too near it ; people have to come from a long distance if they want it to act on them. It 's really all too stupid ; why, I would n't go there even if I were offered a hundred francs ! "

Pierre's immobility was doubtless irritating the barber. He had now begun to shave M. de Guer-

saint's right cheek; and was inveighing against the Fathers of the Immaculate Conception, whose greed for gain was the one cause of all the misunderstanding. These Fathers who were at home there, since they had purchased from the Municipality the land on which they desired to build, did not even carry out the stipulations of the contract they had signed, for there were two clauses in it forbidding all trading, such as the sale of the water and of religious articles. Innumerable actions might have been brought against them. But they snapped their fingers, and felt themselves so powerful that they no longer allowed a single offering to go to the parish, but arranged matters so that the whole harvest of money should be garnered by the Grotto and the Basilica.

And, all at once, Cazaban candidly exclaimed: "If they were only reasonable, if they would only share with us!" Then, when M. de Guersaint had washed his face, and reseated himself, the hairdresser resumed: "And if I were to tell you, monsieur, what they have done with our poor town! Forty years ago all the young girls here conducted themselves properly, I assure you. I remember that in my young days when a young man was wicked he generally had to go elsewhere. But times have changed, our manners are no longer the same. Nowadays nearly all the girls content themselves with selling candles and nosegays; and you must have seen them catching hold of the passers-by and thrusting their goods into their hands! It is really shameful to see so many bold girls about! They make a lot of money, acquire lazy habits, and, in-

stead of working during the winter, simply wait for the return of the pilgrimage season. And I assure you that the young men don't need to go elsewhere nowadays. No, indeed! And add to all this the suspicious floating element which swells the population as soon as the first fine weather sets in—the coachmen, the hawkers, the cantine keepers, all the low-class, wandering folk reeking with grossness and vice—and you can form an idea of the honest new town which they have given us with the crowds that come to their Grotto and their Basilica!"

Greatly struck by these remarks, Pierre had let his newspaper fall and begun to listen. It was now, for the first time, that he fully realised the difference between the two Lourdes—old Lourdes so honest and so pious in its tranquil solitude, and new Lourdes corrupted, demoralised by the circulation of so much money, by such a great enforced increase of wealth, by the ever-growing torrent of strangers sweeping through it, by the fatal rotting influence of the conflux of thousands of people, the contagion of evil examples. And what a terrible result it seemed when one thought of Bernadette, the pure, candid girl kneeling before the wild primitive grotto, when one thought of all the naïve faith, all the fervent purity of those who had first begun the work! Had they desired that the whole countryside should be poisoned in this wise by lucre and human filth? Yet it had sufficed that the nations should flock there for a pestilence to break out.

Seeing that Pierre was listening, Cazaban made a final threatening gesture as though to sweep away all